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**The Coptic Orthodox
Diocese
Of the Southern USA**

Sunday School Curriculum

Grade 12

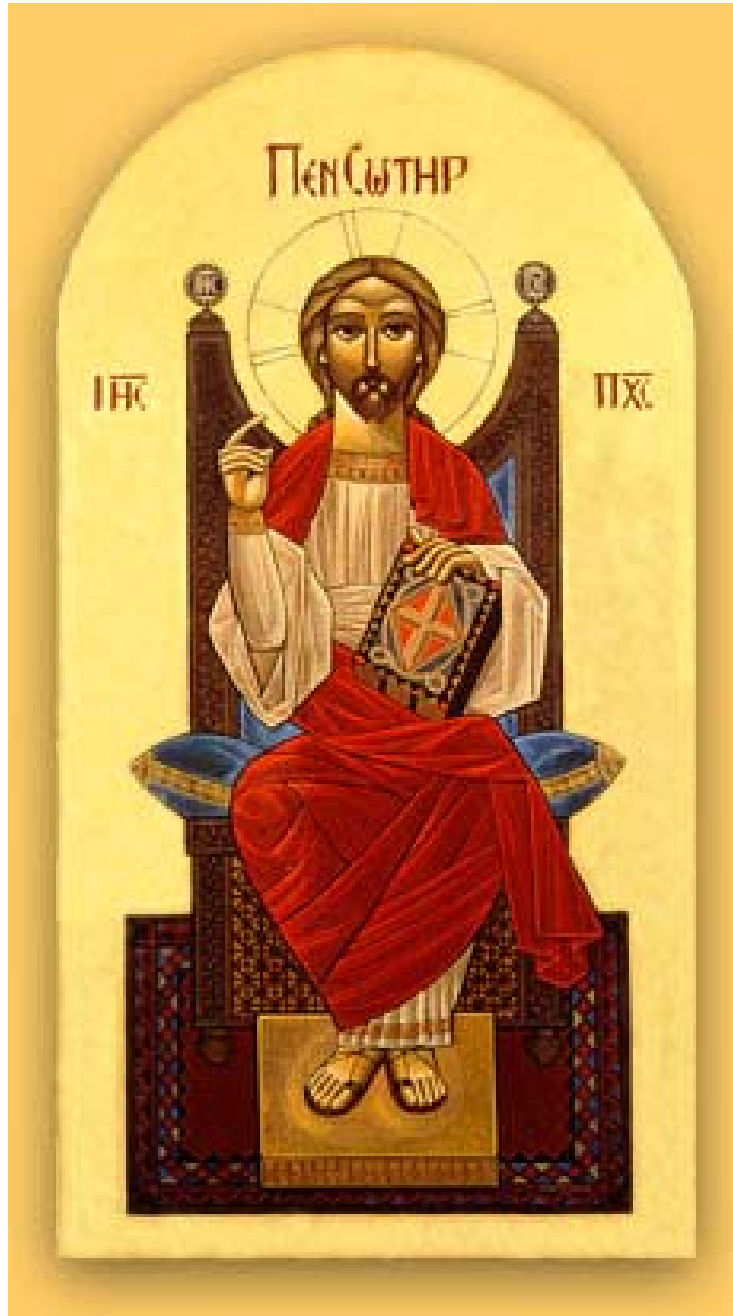






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PREFACE

The Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States, under the auspices of His Grace Bishop Youssef, felt the pressing need for a modified Sunday School Curriculum which would be better suited to address the problems and issues facing children both in America and the lands of immigration. Therefore, the efforts and time of many faithful servants have been dedicated to modify and improve the presently used English translation of the syllabus published by the Youth Services Committee of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate. This has resulted in the elimination of many existing lessons from this syllabus and the substitution with new lessons that are more appropriate for our youth in the American society. These additional lessons give greater consideration to the differences in quality of life, education, media influence, cultural differences and the surrounding diversity of beliefs between Egyptian society and that of the west.

We pray that God may bless this work for the spiritual growth of our children in the immigration countries. We also thank His Grace Bishop Youssef for his continued support, prayers and motivating guidance in this service.

May God reward every servant who offered time and effort toward the completion of this Sunday School Curriculum.

“Thus Far the Lord Has Helped Us”

(1 Samuel 7:12)



INTRODUCTION

This grade 12 Sunday school curriculum has been modified by substituting 21 lessons from the previous curriculum published by the Youth Service Committee of the Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate with new lessons that are suitable for the youth in America. The order of the lessons has also been arranged to follow the major events in the church. Hence, assuming that the starting date is the first week after the Coptic New Year celebration (El Nayrouz) on September 11, the lessons have been arranged in the following order:

- 3 lessons for the month of September.
- 4 lessons for each of the months of October through January.
- Variable number of filler lessons for the period from the beginning of February till Jonah's Fast.
- 2 lessons, one before and one after Jonah's fast.
- 7 lessons during the Great Fast
- 7 lessons for the period between Easter and the Feast of the Pentecost.
- Variable number of filler lessons between the Feast of the Pentecost and the second week of July.
- 3 lessons for the remainder of July.
- 4 lessons for August.
- 1 lesson for the first week of September.

Please note that filler lessons can also be used for the occasional fifth Sunday in any month. These filler lessons are in the beginning of the book and it is preferable that they be used in sequence for the sake of unity in all the churches.

The students of grade 12 enjoy being mentally challenged and appreciate a high level of knowledge and discussion. They also use logic to analyze any information they receive. The new lessons inserted in this curriculum stress more Bible information, knowledge of other beliefs, church history and social topics relevant to this age. Therefore this can still be considered as a preliminary modified curriculum for grade 12 that will require your feedback as a servant in order to continue the improvement process. Any inquiries or comments can be forwarded to ssc100@juno.com.

May the Holy Spirit guide every servant using this curriculum.

FILLER LESSONS

These lessons are to be used for the fifth Sunday in a month and for any week lacking a lesson due to the changing date of the Resurrection Feast.

- 1- The Book of Numbers
- 2- Comparative Theology
- 3- Winning Others to Christ
- 4- The Christian and the Media
- 5- Fellowship Among the Believers
- 6- The Sacrament of Chrismation
- 7- Commitment in Spiritual Life

1- The Book of Numbers

Objective:

- ❖ To understand what is the theme and the contents of the book of Numbers.
- ❖ To understand the dealings of the Lord with His people.

Memory Verse:

“The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord makes His face shine upon you and be gracious to you” (Numbers 6:24).

References:

- ❖ The Book of Numbers.
- ❖ Complete guide to the Bible Readers Digest 1998, Pleasantville - New York, pp.199-209.
- ❖ Interpretation of the Book of Numbers - Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty.

Introduction:

The Book of Numbers is the fourth book of the five-volume history of Israel's birth as a nation. These 5 books, Genesis through Deuteronomy are traditionally attributed to Moses.

For 40 years the Israelites lingered in the desert. The Book of Numbers tells us what happened during those years, from the time Moses and his generation left Mount Sinai until the next generation arrived on the eastern bank of the Jordan River, ready to claim the Promised Land.

The Book of Numbers is divided into 3 main sections:

- ❖ God's organization of the Israelites at Mount Sinai for their march into Canaan (Numbers 1:1-10:10).
- ❖ God's condemnation of the Israelites in the desert south of Canaan to roam there for forty years (Numbers 10:11-21:35).
- ❖ Joshua's leadership on the plains of Moab to cross the Jordan River (Numbers 22:1-36:13).

Lesson Outline:

- ❖ The Israelites have been camping at the base of Mount Sinai for nearly a year, receiving the laws recorded in Exodus and Leviticus. The Lord, then, orders a census of all men aged 20 and older who are able to fight. This census excludes men from the tribe of Levi, who are responsible for maintaining the tabernacle and the nation's system of worship. To keep the number of tribes at 12, Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, are each counted as a separate tribe. The census reveals there are more than 600,000 men able to go to war, i.e. the entire Israelite population would be more than 2 million. God tells Moses to set up camp. In the center is the tabernacle of meeting where the Ark of Covenant was kept, with its single entrance always facing east, toward the rising sun. Priests camp outside the tabernacle. The tribes are arranged so as to face the tabernacle. A group of Levites lead the march, carrying the Ark of Covenant, which represents the earthly throne of God. The 12 tribes follow in four

divisions of three tribes each. On every march Moses recites a prayer expressing his confidence “Arise, O Lord, let your enemies be scattered, and your foes flee before you” (Numbers 10:35).

- ❖ As the journey begins, the Israelites start complaining about their hardships, especially food. Also a power struggle erupts when Moses’ older sister and brother decide that Moses made a mistake by marrying a Cushite. In addition, they claim that God does not speak exclusively through Moses; He speaks through them as well. God tells them that with Moses “I speak with him face to face” (Numbers 12:7-8), not in dreams or visions. God penalizes Miriam to become leprous and she recovers only after she lives outside the camp for a week.
- ❖ Moses selects one leader from each tribe to spy out the land of Canaan. When they returned after 40 days, only 2 of them recommended invasion, Caleb and Joshua. The other 10 spies said “The land through which we have gone as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great stature. There we saw the giants (the descendants of Anak came from the giants); and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their sight” (Numbers 13:32-33).
- ❖ Fear gripped the Israelites and they refused to go any further. Lack of trust in God makes Him furious and He sentenced the entire nation of adults, ages 20 and older to spend 40 years in the wilderness, one year for each day of the spies’ mission. Only Caleb and Joshua will live to reach the Promised Land.
- ❖ Discontentment with Moses and Aaron intensifies. Korah and 250 respected Israelites took their complaint directly to Moses and Aaron demanding to know why the 2 brothers exalted themselves as leaders. God punished the rebels “and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their households and all the men with Korah, with all their goods” (Numbers 16:32). The remaining 250 men were consumed by fire. The Israelites verbally assaulted Moses and Aaron the very next day, accusing them of killing “*the people of the Lord*” (Numbers 16:41). Again, God’s punishment is swift and terrifying. Thousands died as a plague strikes the camp.
- ❖ At the end of Israel’s 40 years in the wilderness, Miriam and Aaron die. Still the people complain bitterly, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and our soul loathes this worthless bread” (Numbers 21:5), referring to the manna the Lord continues to provide each day. God unleashes a plague of poisonous snakes and many Israelites die before they repent and plead with Moses to ask God to remove the snakes. God instructs Moses to make a bronze image of a snake and to set it on a pole “Everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live” (Numbers 21:8). Jesus cited this incidence, referring to His crucifixion, saying, “Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life” (John 3:14-15).
- ❖ Now, Moses and the Israelites capture much of the land immediately east of the Jordan River and as far north as the Sea of Galilee. The king of Moab, a nation east of the Dead Sea, sends for Balaam, a famous seer who lives near the Euphrates River. The king wants to hire Balaam to curse the Israelite invaders. Balaam initially refuses because of a warning from God, later God tells Balaam to speak only the words that he receives from Him. God sends an angel with a drawn sword, seen only by Balaam’s donkey to warn the seer to proclaim only the word of God.

- ❖ Balaam shocks the Moabite king by blessing Israel and cursing Moab. However, Balaam advises the Moabite king to seduce the Israelites to have sexual relations with women and thus incur the wrath of God. This happens and God responds by sending a plague that kills thousands of Israelites.
- ❖ God orders the immediate execution of all tribal leaders who have taken part in the orgy. Phinehas the grandson of Aaron stabs an adulterous Israelite. In recognition of this act of zeal, God lifts the plague.
- ❖ Moses designates Joshua as the new leader who leads the Israelites to the Promised Land where the Mediterranean marks the western boundary, the north, beyond the Sea of Galilee; probably Damascus and the eastern follows The Jordan River to the Dead Sea.

Conclusion:

The Book of Numbers is the book of divine discipline; it becomes necessary for the nation of Israel to go through the painful process of testing and maturation. God must teach His people the consequences of irresponsible decisions. The forty years of wilderness experience transforms them from a rabble of Exodus-slaves into a nation ready to take the Promised Land. The Book of Numbers begins with the old generation moving through a tragic transitional period and ends with the new generation reaching the doorway of the land of Canaan.

Applications:

- ❖ Look for verses to indicate God's care for His people in the wilderness.

2- Comparative Theology

Differences between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches

Objective:

- ❖ To learn the history of the separation of the Catholic Church from the rest of the churches.
- ❖ To understand the differences between the Orthodox and the Catholic Church.

Memory verse:

“Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth” (Ephesians 6:14).

References:

- ❖ The Holy Sacraments of the Coptic Orthodox Church - Sami R. Hanna, Edited by Peter Brownfield 1995, Los Angeles, CA.
- ❖ The precious pearls in the explanation of the church rites, Vol. 2 - Fr. Youhana Salama.

Introduction:

For the first 450 years the church was essentially one. Five historic Patriarchal centers-Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria and Constantinople; formed a cohesive whole and were in full communion with each other. An important division took place in 451 AD during the council of Chalcedon. Then, in 1054 AD, the Roman Patriarch pulled away from the other four, pursuing his long-developing claim of universal headship of the church.

Lesson Outline:

I. Disclaimer

- ❖ Catholic Church is apostolic
- ❖ Practice the sacraments
- ❖ One of the original 5 Christian sees of the early church
- ❖ We are more similar than we are different
- ❖ Not intended to be an attack on the church
- ❖ Simply analyzing teaching and dogma in light of:
 - a) Scripture
 - b) Fathers
 - c) Church tradition
- ❖ We are called to identify false teachers
 - a) (Matthew 7:15) “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves”.
 - b) (2 Peter 2:1) “But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even

denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction”.

- c) (1 John 4:1) “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world”.
- d) (2 Thessalonians 2:15) “Therefore, brethren, stand fast and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle”.
- e) (Galatians 1:8) “But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed”.
- f) (Galatians 1:9) “As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed”.

❖ We are judging the teaching and not the people.

II. Supremacy of St. Peter

A. Primacy of honor not of authority

- ❖ Rome insists that all Christian Churches should submit to the Catholic Pope.
 - a) No reconciliation until this first step is taken.
 - b) No authority over other bishops.
 - c) Nowhere in Scripture do we see St. Peter taking decisions on his own.

B. First among equals

- ❖ In the early church all were equal with different areas of jurisdiction.
- ❖ St. Peter is certainly the foremost among the disciples, but again only in honor.
 - a) Spoke on behalf of the Apostles.
 - b) Mentioned first in all the list of the Apostles in Scripture.
 - c) “...As having precedence in honor, he (Peter) always begins the discourse. But observe how Peter does everything with common consent; nothing imperiously (domineering, dictatorial).” (St. John Chrysostom).

III. Papal Infallibility

- ❖ Became dogma in 1870’s under Pope Pious.

A. Misunderstood verses

- ❖ (Matthew 16:18) “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.
- ❖ (Matthew 16:19) “And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

B. Rock of Faith

- ❖ The rock to which Christ alluded is the rock of faith, the proclamation that He is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.

C. Could not mean flesh and blood

- ❖ (Colossians 3:10) “According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it”.
 - a) (1 Corinthians 3:11) “For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ”.
 - b) (Ephesians 2:20) “Having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone”.
 - c) (1 Corinthians 10:4) “And all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ”.
 - d) (Matthew 7:24) “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock”.

D. John 21:15-16

- ❖ “So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You’. He said to him, ‘Feed My lambs’. He said to him again a second time, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?’ He said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord; You know that I love You’. He said to him, ‘Tend My sheep’. He said to him the third time, ‘Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?’ Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, ‘Do you love Me?’ And he said to Him, ‘Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You’. Jesus said to him, ‘Feed My sheep’”.
 - a) Here Christ restores St. Peter’s apostleship.
 - b) Three times in the same way he denied Him.

E. St. Peter in Scripture

- ❖ Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:4-35)
 - a) St. Peter was simply one of the attendees.
 - b) St. James led the council and arrived at the conclusion.
- ❖ Rebuked sharply by St. Paul (Galatians 2:11-14)
 - c) Clearly St. Paul did not consider St. Peter his superior.
- ❖ Apostles sent Peter and John (Acts 8:14)
 - d) If Peter were the superior, he would be doing the sending.

IV. Purgatory**A. Temporary place**

- ❖ Soul is purified
- ❖ Cleansed of sin
- ❖ Believers on earth pray for these souls

B. History

- ❖ Idea started in 1215 at Latran council
- ❖ 1274 at Leon council
- ❖ 1431 at Florence

- ❖ 1545-1563 at Trent council (became official Church position)

C. Justification

- ❖ (1 Corinthians 3:15) “If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.” Refers to the service and the work of ministers, not concerning punishment and judgment.

D. Response

- ❖ Many verses clearly indicate that God forgave all our sins through the Blood of Christ.
- ❖ Most suitable candidate for Purgatory was the right-hand thief, he went to Paradise.

V. Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary

A. Claim

- ❖ The Virgin must have been born without sin in order to give birth to the Son of God.

B. Response

- ❖ Only person born without sin was Christ.
- ❖ (Luke 1:46) “And Mary said: My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior”.
 - a) St. Mary herself claims she is in need of a Savior.
 - b) If she were born without sin she would not need salvation.
 - c) Holy Spirit overshadowed her and prepared her body and soul to bear the Word of God.
 - d) (Romans 5:12) “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned”.

VI. Procession of the Holy Spirit (Filioque)

A. Change to the Creed

- ❖ Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son.

B. Background

- ❖ Leo III, Pope of Rome: Engraved creed on two tablets of silver with the following inscription: “I, Leo, have put up these tablets for the love and preservation of the Orthodox faith”.

C. Problems

- ❖ Makes the Holy Spirit a lesser Person of the Trinity.
- ❖ Implies two origins rather than One (the Father).

D. Response

- ❖ Clause was added without authority of an ecumenical council.
- ❖ Rome acted alone without consent of other bishops.
- ❖ (John 15:26) “But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me”.
- ❖ (John 16:7) “Nevertheless I tell you the truth. It is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I depart, I will send Him to you”.

VII. Lesser Differences

A. Facing East

- ❖ Face any direction
 - a) East has special significance.
 - b) Christ was born in the east.
 - c) The Magi came from the east.
 - d) The star rose from the east.
 - e) Paradise was in the east.
 - f) Christ's Second Coming will be from the east.
 - g) Sun rises in the east; Christ is the sun of righteousness Who shines His light on us we who sit in the darkness and shadow of death.
 - h) Virgin Mary was likened to a gate facing the east (Ezekiel 44:1).

B. Baptism by Immersion and not sprinkling

- ❖ Christ came up out of the water (Matthew 3:16).
- ❖ Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:38-39).
- ❖ Baptism is death with Christ.
- ❖ Baptism is a new birth; birth means one body coming out of another body.
- ❖ Greek word means to dye.

C. Divorce

- ❖ Catholics do not permit divorce under any circumstances, even in cases of adultery.
 - a) (Matthew 19:9) "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."

D. Eucharist

- ❖ Catholics stopped adding yeast to the bread
 - a) Yeast represents sin.
 - b) Christ bore the sin of the world.
- ❖ Catholics do not commune the Blood, only the Body.

Conclusion:

- ❖ Although there are some differences in beliefs between the orthodox and the Catholic Church, the love and respect we have to all Christians remain a unifying power toward resolution of the differences in the future.

Applications:

- ❖ Search for the major similarities between the two churches.
- ❖ Search for facts around the history of the separation of the Catholic Church.

3- Winning Others to Christ

Objective:

- ❖ To learn the role of our church in Evangelism.
- ❖ To understand the importance of evangelism as part of our Christian life.

Memory Verse:

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

References:

- ❖ <http://pharos.bu.edu/cn/lessons/Evangelism.txt>
- ❖ Evangelism conventions

Introduction:

Our Evangelical Role in the Modern Society being a Church who struggled throughout its history for survival from persecution and for defending the true faith from heresies, we often forget the importance of Evangelism-especially during the last few centuries in Egypt, due to the enacted laws forbidding evangelism. What is Evangelism?

The Webster dictionary’s definition of “Evangelize” is “to preach the gospel to” or “to convert to Christianity”. The word “Evangelism” implies a strong “zeal” towards “the winning or revival of personal commitments to Christ”. Thus to evangelize is to spread with zeal the “Good News” of Christ’s salvation and to win people to Christ. As Christians we have a responsibility to evangelize. In this discussion, we will establish that responsibility and talk about how we could fulfill such a responsibility in the “modern world” we live in.

Lesson Outline:

I. Evangelism in Coptic History

The Coptic Church’s history is one of evangelizing the whole world. Examples are plentiful. Our saints spread the Gospel to Switzerland and Ireland. Evangelism is a duty. There are several references in the Bible about the responsibility of each one of us with regard to evangelism. Here are some of these references: “Then, as He was now drawing near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to rejoice and praise God with a loud voice for all the mighty works they had seen, saying: Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest! And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, ‘Teacher, rebuke Your disciples’. But He answered and said to them; I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:38-40). God expects us to glorify Him “for all [His] mighty works”.

The above verses point to the importance of communicating what we know of Christ’s work to others. Moreover, it answers the question of “why us?” The answer is because we have “seen His mighty works” - because we are witnesses. This is even clearer in the words of our Lord before His ascension “Then He said to them, ‘Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer

and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And you are witnesses of these things” (Luke 24:46-48) and “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Christ emphasized the role of His followers towards the rest of the world and the importance of our mission as His representatives on earth “You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled under foot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:13-16). If the whole world is not glorifying the name of the Lord it is because of our hiding the light “under the basket”. As responsible citizens we have a civil duty to attest any incident that we know is true. For example, if we witness a murder, we have a civil duty to report it. If we know that a fellow citizen is in eminent danger, and we can do something about it, then it is our duty to try to help that person. Our citizenship in the body of Christ (the Church) is no different “For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

We owe it to the Church - Our Christianity survived only because of the faith of the “cloud of witnesses”, who preserved our true faith through persecutions and didn’t spare even their blood. We owe it to the church! If we don’t do it, this chain of witnesses will be weakened.

Evangelism brings Joy. We notice that St. Paul was rejoiced in the souls he saved and brought to Christ.

Evangelism is very much in need. The Lord Jesus Christ tells us that the work is plentiful but the laborers are few.

Evangelism is the work of God through us. God equips us through His Holy Spirit with gifts that help us spread the Good News of salvation. These gifts may be very different from one person to the other and from one time to the other. During the time of the early church, we see gifts such as speaking in tongues, speaking with prophecies, and the capacity to perform miracles. Some of these gifts are clear through St. Paul’s words to the Romans: “Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness” (Romans 12:6-8). We should always use the gifts and talents entrusted to us, like the wise servant who received five talents and worked hard to deserve the Lord’s praise “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord” (Matthew 25:21). And we should never be frightened like the servant who “was afraid and went and hid [God’s] talent” (Matthew 25:25). If God chooses us to work for Him, it is important that we do not turn away. We all know the story of Jonah when he tried to avoid the mission entrusted to him by God. Also, we all know the story of St. Paul and how he was selected to serve the Lord “for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). Thus it is God who chooses His servants. Not only that, but also how they would serve Him. Another important issue is for us to realize that we have to obey God’s plan for the structure of His ministry. He chose disciples and through them bishops, priests, deacons, servants, and His entire congregation.

Evangelism is the responsibility of all. However, each has a role and we should respect and abide by other people's authority. For example, when we are asked questions that we are unable to answer, we should refer to other authorities in God's structure for His church. For He said; "And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19).

Evangelism is not for one's own purposes. Many people may use evangelism to suit their purposes. We know of the first such story in Acts, when Ananias and Sapphira wanted to get the blessings of St. Peter and the gifts of the Holy Spirit without their hearts being completely tuned in to serving God. This is also evident in St. Peter's words to Simon who wanted to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit with his own money for his own purposes: "You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God" (Acts 8:21) -for Jesus reminded His disciples to "Freely you have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8). When we spread the Gospel of Good News, we have to remember that in doing so we do not have any credit in the results of our evangelism. This is very clear in St. Paul's strong words to the Corinthians: "Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one? I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase" (1 Corinthians 1:13,3:5-7).

II. Active Evangelism

Our church history is full of stories that attest to active evangelism, starting with St. Mark, who couldn't stop the fire of the Holy Spirit inside him from introducing to Anianus the true "One God" that Anianus called upon when he injured himself while fixing St. Mark's sandals.

III. Reactive Evangelism

We must use opportunities that present themselves. If a friend of ours asks us about our beliefs, we should not shy away. If we are asked we should answer (react) and use the opportunity to be witnesses for Christ.

IV. Passive Evangelism

Our actions-the way we go about living our life-could be very useful to spread the Gospel. There are many examples of this "silent" evangelism. From the Old Testament, we know the story of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. They obeyed all the orders of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, except when asked not to "petition any god or man except the king". Even then, they accepted the punishment of being thrown into "the den of lions" (Daniel 6:12), only for God to be glorified through their passive evangelism.

Applications:

Evangelism today:

- ❖ Is it acceptable?
- ❖ How do we do it? (One-on-one; public service; etc.)
- ❖ Where do we start?
- ❖ What are our limits?

4- The Christian and the Media

Objective:

- ❖ “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? For you are the temple of the living God” (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

Memory Verse:

“All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12).

Lesson Outline:

There is no doubt that the world today is undergoing a tremendous revolution in the domain of mass media, which is evolving with astonishing speed. For example, in the span of a few years, we have seen the development in television into colored pictures; then we have seen the video through which recordings we wish to preserve are possible, and to which we have access whenever we want.

The progress in transmitting pictures has become so great that there has been uproar in France due to the overpowering attraction of American television. This reaches the French very clearly, and relays the thoughts, culture and negative aspects of the American society with such great impact that the French are beginning to dread the loss of their identity in spite of their outstanding history and culture.

Consequently, the study of influence of mass media upon our youth becomes a necessity. It is moreover, important to know how to develop an open-minded attitude and heart in facing its impact.

There is no error in having different forms of mass media in the Christian home, from television, to newspapers, to magazines.

But the error lies in the neglect of educating the conscience of youth. In fact we need to educate the conscience of the parents themselves as to how to make the right selection. Everyone must learn how to choose the proper cultural media, programs, books, etc. Leaving our children exposed to trivial and negative media that are destructive and hardly edifying is a matter that deserves consideration and self-accountability.

We are looking forward to the day when the media will present what is constructive for our children, for life is not a series of immoral theatrical situations nor is it a show of violence. Indeed, mass media should promote man and his instincts rather than demean them. There are multiple scientific literary, artistic and sportive spheres and even more appropriate there are religious domains that oppose atheism and spread love. This is what we should look out for in media.

I. The Influence Of The Media

A. The spiritual perspective

Mass media affects youth in two ways:

- ❖ It occupies their time, distracting them from important, edifying, and basic matters related to the salvation of the soul. For example, we are often obliged to modify the hours of Sunday classes and youth meetings so that they do not conflict with the times when television films or

football matches are presented. Moreover, television often occupies our time and attracts our attention for such long periods that definitely affects our spiritual education, whether this involves our individual worship, or our participation in family and general worship.

- ❖ Some television programs are stumbling blocks for Christian youth. They often deal with issues that are inappropriate and with morals that are in conflict with Christian dignity, as well as with our principles since they are different from those of our faith. All of which could arouse responses that conflict with the Christian sense of respect and chastity.

B. The social perspective

- ❖ Mass media present social programs that host authors who discuss unbelievable family and social problems. These reveal the immorality that is prevalent in society but of which we were unaware. Thus we are presented with those who deceive, steal or act violently and gradually we learn to live with and in time to accept this behavior as part of our life at home even though they are completely foreign and far distant from Christian purity.

C. The cultural perspective

- ❖ There is bitter complaint concerning the shallowness of materials created by authors and thinkers. There are hardly any authors of humane fiction or of social edification. Due to such a state, there is a threat to the Christian personality since it is exposed to the triviality of television programs as well as to the immorality prevalent in western life and which are shown in different forms of media.

D. The behavioral perspective

- ❖ There can be no doubt that the wave of violence pervading movies and television screens finds a response particularly in youth and their behavior. Los Angeles police in the United States noted that a particular sort of crime predominantly took place the next hour following a certain television show. This indicated that viewers watched, and then went out to put into practice what they had seen. It even seems that movies these days depend on two types of films; those portraying violence and those exposing physical lust. These downgrade man to the vilest form of existence for they address the two instincts of killing and sex.

II. How can we face these influences?

A. Spiritual satisfaction

- ❖ “A satisfied soul loathes the honeycomb, but to a hungry soul every bitter thing is sweet” (Proverbs 27:7). Thus, if we fill our youth with Christ, the Bible, stories of saintly fathers and ecclesiastical life, with hymns, songs, spiritual readings and ministry in the city and surrounding precincts; we will satisfy them, thereby enabling them to overcome the tyrannical flow of the media. It will become easy for them to resist its strong influence. Those who are really and fully satisfied will decide to watch the little that is beneficial and reject all else, as they are empowered by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

B. Cultural satisfaction

- ❖ There was a time when our homes were filled with all up to date literature in the spiritual, philosophical and scientific spheres. The father used to read a book, allow his son to read it. Then they would join, in a marvelous spirit, in discussion. Today, sadly enough, we depend on the superficial culture offered by the papers, magazines, or television screens.

- ❖ We need to develop a new urge to read and urge to charge the brain and life with a holy keenness and wholesome inclinations. Youth should not find time to waste in depravity and immorality. A cultured person gains inner strength that protects him in the face of trivialities and attracts him to constructive programs and books.

C. Positive selections

- ❖ When the heart is filled with Christ, positive thought, and culture, it becomes easy for man to distinguish between the trivial and the valuable, and to select programs, friends, books and magazines that edify him while rejecting destructive ones.
- ❖ A Christian person, moreover, possesses the guidance and inspiring inner light granted by God. This allows him to “examine everything and hold on to that which is good.” He weighs matters according to three criteria stated in the three verses:
 - a) “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not helpful” (1 Corinthians 6:12).
 - b) “All things are lawful for me, but all things do not edify” (1 Corinthians 10:23).
 - c) “All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of anything” (1 Corinthians 6:12).
- ❖ Thus a Christian person enjoys inner freedom. He reads, studies discusses, reviews, travels abroad and returns home: and “*yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved*” (Romans 8:37).

Applications:

- ❖ Let us live a fulfilling life with our youth: spiritually and culturally satisfying.
- ❖ Let us carry on with them a constant dialogue that is edifying to their conscience and character in Jesus Christ. Thus they will not be as a feather exposed to the winds but rather they will be completely filled by God. Consequently, they will walk in faith and holiness to testify for Christ who has redeemed them.

5- Fellowship among Believers

Objective:

- ❖ The integration and unification of the whole body is achieved by the fellowship among members.

Memory Verse:

“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7).

References:

- ❖ Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37
- ❖ Romans 12
- ❖ 1 Corinthians 12
- ❖ Ephesians 4:1-16; 25-32

Introduction:

Read 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12. Discuss with your students what the text is about (Fellowship among believers and ties with members, which form one body; that is the Church).

Lesson Outline:

I. Communion With Believers Is The Participation In Our Lord Jesus Christ

Draw a parallel between our relationship with our Lord Jesus and that of the vine with its branches. Jesus is the origin of the vine, and each true believer is a live branch fixed in the origin and drawing from Him, the elixir of life. As long as the believer is steadfastly rooted in the vine, he will consequently gain fellowship with the other branches, fruit, and leaves.

Ii. The Early Church Experienced Communal Life

Analysis: Acts 2:42-47; Acts 4:32-37.

- ❖ The disciples regularly joined together in one spirit for prayer and supplication. The women, Mary the mother of Jesus, and His brothers were also there (Acts 1:14). They all joined as one soul, one existence, and one heart (Acts 2:1,46; Acts 4:32).
- ❖ Communal worship and communal doctrines (Acts 2:42,46,47).
- ❖ Witnesses joined in faith (Acts 4:32).
- ❖ Witnesses gathered around the holy offering of the Eucharist (Acts 2:42).
- ❖ The Agape (sharing a meal) table (Acts 2:46).
- ❖ Spontaneous sharing of money and possessions (Acts 4:32,34-3) “they had all things in common” (Acts 4:32).

Iii. Characteristics Of The Fellowship Among Believers “Canonization”

- ❖ Its basis and main role is to achieve steadfastness and unity in God.
- ❖ A communion achieved through faith and belief.
 - d) “One Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Ephesians 4:5).
 - e) “One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:6).
- ❖ The wisdom of the Church in reciting the Creed of Faith in a loud voice is to inculcate the basis of our faith. It ensures the isolation of heretics and contrivers, and their banishment from the Church (1 Thessalonians 3:10; 2 John 1:10,11).

Iv. Fellowship Demonstrated In Holiness And Chastity

- ❖ It is a communion among saints living in purity and rejecting the way of the world and its uncleanness. They seek to live according to the way of the Lord (Hebrews 12:12-16).
- ❖ The Church used to eliminate its ties with the wicked, the immoral, and the adulterers (1 Corinthians 5:9-13).

Ii. Fellowship Achieved Through Worship And Rejoicing

- ❖ The Church has its communal prayers, such as those of the Holy Mass and its communal praises, such as the Psalms, the Psalmody, and the prayers of the Coptic month of Kiahk.
- ❖ The Church also observes general fasting periods in which everybody participates to create an atmosphere of ritual, of worship, and of purity. This allows the Church to rise above physical bonds and all the earthly lusts they involve.
- ❖ The whole Church joins in the offering of the Eucharist announcing that we may be one body and one spirit and “that we may have a share and an inheritance with all the Saints” (Divine Liturgy).

III. Fellowship Based On Love And Sympathy

- ❖ Divine Love in the Church gathers everyone in reciprocal love. Each one places his brother before himself in the place of honor, as it is stated in the Bible (1 Corinthians 12:25, 26).
- ❖ Fellowship of love in the Church is beyond slander and seeks to promote the exchange of sympathy to limitless giving (Acts 3:15; 1 John 3:17-18).
- ❖ Therefore the first Church lived in the spirit of sharing (Acts 4:34; Romans 12:9-13).

IV. Fellowship Achieved Through Integration And Cooperation

- ❖ St. Paul, the apostle, speaks in Romans 16 and Corinthians 12 about the integration in the one Body of Christ, made up of various members. In spite of the diversity of their functions all members work together, harmoniously, for the well being of the body (1 Corinthians 12:14-25).
- ❖ In the same way, there are multiple talents just as there are multiple members (1 Corinthians 12:4-7).
- ❖ Moreover, the tasks and services are numerous and each of us should stand in the appropriate post assigned to him/her by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 4:10).

V. Our Spiritual Life Originated And Formed Through The Life Of Fellowship In The Church

- ❖ The Church servant discusses with his students the extent of which they respond to the life of fellowship with believers, through which communal prayers gain greater efficacy and strength. The wonderful power of communal worship and its support to the spiritual life of each person; the efficacy of communion of the Holy Mysteries, the general fasts, the sermons and the spiritual (retreat) days, the fellowship of the Sainly fathers as they sustain our struggle by praying and interceding on our behalf, communal life of the Church and how it enriches, discovers, and guides our talents so that they may be used for the glory of God and the expansion of His Holy Kingdom.

VI. Sayings of the Father

- ❖ If you have been born in Christianity, then everyone else born in Christ is your brother. Consequently, if you love yourself more than your brother, this does not arise from Christ (a spiritual elder).
- ❖ The younger member adds brightness to the elder, as the simple eyelid is the beauty of the eye. Therefore a person, who resists his younger brother, resists himself. Moreover, harm does not fall upon the person resisted, but rather it reverts to and harms the initiator, in a greater degree than that caused to his brother (St. John Chrysostom).

Applications:

- ❖ Discover some of your talents and use them for the benefit of the Church.
- ❖ Spend a vigil of prayer in Church.
- ❖ Join in providing the needs of the saints (brothers in God).
 - a) Offer clothes, covers, or food.
 - b) Contribute to the education of needy colleagues.
 - c) Visit an orphanage and donate some gifts.
- ❖ Pray for the weak, the stumbling, and the fallen.

6- The Sacrament of Chrismation (Myron)

Objective:

- ❖ To understand the importance and the ritual of the sacrament of Chrismation.
- ❖ To know the history of the Myron oil.

Memory Verse:

“He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God” (2 Corinthians 1:21).

References:

- ❖ The Holy Sacraments of the Coptic Orthodox Church - Sami R. Hanna, edited by Peter Brownfield, 1995, Los Angeles, CA.
- ❖ The precious pearls in explaining the church rites and believes - Vol. 2 - Fr. Youhana Salama (Arabic).

Introduction:

From earliest times, the church has practiced Chrismation immediately following baptism. In the sacrament of Chrismation (from the Greek word “Chrismatis”, which means “Anointing”) the newly baptized person receives the Holy Spirit through anointing with oil by the bishop or priest (the Myron). The roots of this sacrament are clear in both the Old and New Testaments, and are especially brought to light on the Day of Pentecost.

- ❖ Chrismation is established by Christ.
- ❖ Wisdom has built her house; she has hewn out her seven pillars (Proverbs 9:1).
- ❖ Sacramental Life:
 - Fellowship with the Holy Spirit.
 - An invisible grace administered by a visible sign providing spiritual effects.

Lesson Outline:

I. What Is It?

A. Orthodox understanding

- ❖ Granted as a grace for the child.
- ❖ In the same way that baptism is given based on the faith of the parents.

B. Christ

Christ means “Anointed”.

II. Spiritual Effects

A. Necessary for salvation (Seal of the Holy Spirit)

- ❖ (2 Corinthians 1:21,22) “Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a deposit”.

- ❖ (Ephesians 1:13) “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise”, (Ephesians 1:14) “who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory”.

B. Recipient becomes the temple of the Holy Spirit

- ❖ (1 Corinthians 3:16) “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?”
- ❖ (1 Corinthians 6:19) “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?”
- ❖ Grieving the Holy Spirit: (Ephesians 4:30) “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption”.

III. How Is It Administered?

A. Immediately after baptism, using the Myron oil

B. Signings of the Cross

- ❖ 36 times
 - a) 8 for Head: consecrating the thoughts and the senses
 - 1. Forehead: consecrate the thoughts
 - 2. Each eye: consecrate the sight
 - 3. Each nostril: consecrate the smell
 - 4. Mouth: consecrate speech
 - 5. Ears: consecrate the sounds one hears
 - a) 12 for arms (top and bottom of each arm): symbolize consecrating the person’s actions
 - 1. Shoulder
 - 2. Elbow
 - 3. Wrist
 - b) 12 for legs (top and bottom of each leg): symbolize consecrating the person’s path
 - 1. Thigh
 - 2. Knee
 - 3. Ankle
 - c) 4 for front and back of body
 - 1.heart: symbol of emotions and feelings
 - 2.navel: symbol of the soul
 - 3.upper back: symbol of the will and strength
 - 4.lower back (kidney): symbol of the conscience

IV. How Is It Prepared?

A. Same spices as those used in anointing Christ for His burial

- ❖ Olive oil

- a) Some of the ingredients can be found in Exodus 30:22-33.
- b) We have become consecrated for God and Him alone.

B. Pope and Bishops prepare it as needed

- d) Rite is performed on Great Friday in one of the monasteries.
- e) Ingredients are added to existing quantity.

C. Distribution

- ❖ Given to each Church as needed.

V. Anointing in the Old Testament

A. Holy Spirit and the believers

- ❖ Did not dwell in each believer.
- ❖ Only certain ones and for certain times.

B. Prophets were responsible for anointing

- ❖ Samuel

- a) 1 Samuel 9:27 “As they were going down to the outskirts of the city, Samuel said to Saul, ‘Tell the servant to go on ahead of us’. And he went on. ‘But you stand here awhile, that I may announce to you the word of God’”.
- b) 1 Samuel 10:1 “Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on his head, and kissed him and said: Is it not because the Lord has anointed you commander over His inheritance?”
- c) 1 Samuel 10:10 “When they came there to the hill, there was a group of prophets to meet him; then the Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied among them”.
- d) 1 Samuel 16:13 “Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward. So Samuel arose and went to Ramah”.

- ❖ Nathan

- a) (1 Kings 1:34) “There let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel; and blow the horn, and say, long live King Solomon!”

- ❖ Elijah

- a) 1 Kings 19:15 “Then the Lord said to him: Go, return on your way to the Wilderness of Damascus; and when you arrive, anoint Hazael as king over Syria”. 1 Kings 19:16 “Also you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi as king over Israel. And Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel Meholah you shall anoint as prophet in your place”.

C. King of Israel should be anointed

- ❖ King Saul
- ❖ King David

- a) Later, the head of the Church would anoint earthly kings and royalty.

VI. Chrismation in the Early Church

A. How the Holy Spirit was received?

- ❖ By laying of hands
 - a) (Acts 8:17,18) “Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles’ hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money”.
 - b) (Acts 19:5) “When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus”.
 - c) (Acts 19:6) “And when Paul had laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke with tongues and prophesied”.
- ❖ Must be performed by one of the apostles.
- ❖ Later had to be a bishop.
- ❖ Practicality
 - d) As faith spread, it became difficult to perform sacrament in a timely manner.
 - a) The church decided to use oil.
 - b) Priests were given permission to administer sacrament with the bishop’s blessing.

Applications:

- ❖ The sacrament of Chrismation is one of the seven sacraments in the Orthodox Church, which seals the Christian with the seal of our Lord Jesus Christ.

7- Commitment in Spiritual Life

Meditation:

“Go in through the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are the ones entering in through it. For narrow is the gate, and constricted is the way that leads away into life, and few are the ones finding it” (Matthew 7:13-14).

When our Lord Jesus Christ said that we should “*go in through the narrow gate*”, He did not mean it as a commandment for Christians to seek narrow gates but He meant it as a sign. It is a sign of what a Christian’s life will be like if he/she decides to follow God. God does not want us to choose the most difficult ways of living or to try to be as miserable as possible in this world so as to enter the heavenly kingdom. But if we, Christians, offer our lives to Christ and commit to Him, we will go through tribulations (i.e. the narrow gate) due to the evilness of this world. Do not be weary though, for when God sees that we are trying our best to stand steadfast by Him, He will immediately send help from above in a miraculous way to pull us out to safety.

Objective:

- ❖ Commitment (seriousness) in Spiritual Life

Memory Verse:

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written: For Your sake we are killed all day long” (Romans 8:35,36).

References:

- ❖ New King James Bible.
- ❖ A sermon by Father Angelos in El-Manial Church during the revival in the year 1997.

Introduction:

We all strive to be saints during this life but many times we fall short to achieving our goal and we feel like we are dragged back to where we started. We then wonder how these people that the Church mentions in the Synaxarium became the saints they are. These saints lived in the same evil world we live in, they were tempted with the same temptations that we are tempted with, and some of them even lived a worse life than us all. So why are these people saints and we are not? The answer to the question is very simple. Maybe these people lived a part of their life in darkness and evil, as with St. Moses the black, but at one point they made a commitment to God and did not turn back away from it. They became committed and serious about their spiritual life no matter what risks, dangers, or losses they had to endure as a result to their steadfast stand to such a decision.

Lesson Outline:

Most of us live in a state of a coma. We work in the morning, watch TV in the evening, eat when hungry, and sleep when tired. We don’t have any set standards or spiritual goals in our lives. We then go to confession and say that we feel like sinners and do not know what to do. First and foremost we

need to sit with ourselves and know whether we are serious about Jesus Christ or not, whether we are willing to do what it takes for us to be His or not, or are we so weak that after hearing His calling and seeing his open loving arms, we decide to “*be sad at the Word, and go away grieving*” (Mark 10:22) as did the rich man.

Most of us are always looking for *things* to do to earn the heavenly kingdom. It would be our dream come true if our father of confession would give us a list of 1,2,3's to do that will guarantee us heaven. Unfortunately God is not like that. God does not work with lists or requirements. We cannot just give Him *what is His*, and then we're free to do whatever we want. The commandment is very clear, “*you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your mind, and with all your strength*” (Mark 12:30). **A full and complete life commitment** to worship God and to follow Him to the ends of the earth is our key to abide in Him. No space for the world or any of its desires should be present after Jesus comes in.

I. Characteristic Features Of A Serious Spiritual Life

When we meditate on the lives of the saints of our Church, we always see four characteristic features in their spiritual life. These four aspects or characteristics should be the cornerstone and the blue print of our own spiritual lives.

A. Clarity of goal

First point to a successful serious spiritual life is a clear goal; eyes wide open on the road; a mission; a plan. Sadly however, we sometimes even forget the reason why we come to Church. Who can boldly say, “I come to Church to meet with Jesus?” Who of us is actually coming to Church to ask for a favor from God, to meet with friends, to just satisfy his parents, or to not even feel guilt for not going to Church on Sundays, and who among us is actually coming to Church to have a personal chat with Jesus?

Since we do not have a clear goal, we are lost and confused. We do not know which college to go to, what field to major in, whom to marry what job to accept.... etc. Our Church fathers did not have that confusion in their lives. They had a clear goal.

Even when their neck was under the sword, their goal was still clear, Jesus Christ. No one could shake their faith; their goal was clear. Their clear goal was “my life does not matter, my life does not make a difference, that is how much I do not care if I live or die as long as I live with Jesus Christ, that is how much clear I see the way.” Their vision was so clear that the Church decided to name those who died for Jesus Christ *Martyrs*, which means, “to see”. Martyrdom means the “vision” or the “revelation”.

In Church manuscripts there is a story about an emperor that was persecuting Christians. One day he was torturing an 87-year-old man by the name of Polycarp. The emperor felt so sad for that old man and for what he was going through that he told him, “Have mercy on your age and deny Jesus Christ so that I may grant you mercy”. With all faith and with all clarity of goal the old man Polycarp told him, “87 years I lived with Jesus Christ and he never betrayed me, how can I betray him now?” St. Polycarp is indeed a deserving saint in our Church, may we all ask for his prayers and supplications to the Lord Jesus Christ on our behalf that He may grant us clarity of goal.

Let us all have a clear and an apparent Jesus. Lets us not put Him on a balance and see what we need to give up to have Him and then weigh it out. How can one weigh an absolute such as our Lord Jesus Christ with relative things of this world? And if Jesus is our absolute, then there is no other absolute out there, for there can only be one right absolute “Do not love the world nor the things in

the world. The world is passing away, and its lust. But the one doing the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15-17).

B. Determination

Second point to a successful serious spiritual life is persistence. One can imagine all the thoughts that went through St. Anthony’s head when he decided to go live in the desert. The devil definitely had tried to discourage him telling him how cold and hot the desert will be, how full of snakes and wild beasts it will be, and how lonely it will be. But because of St. Anthony’s determination on living with Jesus Christ, Christianity all around the world now enjoys the heavenly aspect of Monasticism.

A few years ago when Russia was a communist Country, Christianity was outlawed. Priests, clergy, and any testifying Christians were arrested and locked up in concentration camps. They were tortured to extremes to deny Christ but just like St. Polycarp, they all had a clear goal and were determined in their commitment to follow Jesus Christ, no matter the circumstances.

One day, one of the priests in the prison saved his one and only meal of the day, a piece of bread, to use it as the bread of offering for he longed for a liturgy and communion. He gathered all the clergy and they all decided to pray a liturgy but did not know where is a worthy place in such a dirty prison cell to use as an altar to officiate the sacrament. With some simple meditation they remembered that an altar is a place where Jesus Christ is sacrificed so with all unity they went towards the most tortured prisoner among them, the one lying in the corner covered with wounds and blood who could not move out of pain who has not denied Christ despite of all the tortures he experienced, and decided that his body is a worthy altar to sacrifice Jesus on. They placed the bread on him and started praying the liturgy.

Why couldn’t they just deny Jesus Christ and go back home to their families and to a normal painless life? To them, that life they would have earned if they had denied Jesus Christ would have been more horrible and painful than the life of starvation and torture they were experiencing in prison.

During early Christianity, when Airiness became a governor over one of the Christian Roman villages he made a declaration that when he comes into the city the next day he will kill all people inside the Church thus starting an era of Christian persecution. He decided that he will spare the villagers who will not go to Church for he will assume that they have denied Jesus Christ and decided to worship the emperor. The next day came and Airiness marched into the city with his army as he declared, and to his surprise all the streets and the houses were deserted but for one crippled old lady with a cane in the middle of the street. He rode his horse towards her and he commended her on her decision to obey him and to deny Jesus Christ so as to live. The old crippled lady with all disappointment said, “I am but an old crippled lady and everybody was in a hurry to go to Church and the Church is crowded and no one had the time to carry me in, but I am a Christian”... It is said that on that day blood flowed in the roads and the streets of the village for it was a great massacre and a mass slaughter. When people from neighboring cities heard what happened, they all came down to the village to be martyred too. Why didn’t these simple villagers just deny Jesus Christ, even just publicly in order to live, to raise their children and to pass down their lands? The answer is that they couldn’t. They saw the goal so clearly and they had determination that can move mountains.

We all might make decisions to follow Jesus Christ but we are not determined about it when it comes down to it at the first temptation we face, we start compromising and making excuses and then we finally let it slide. We have to be strict and serious when it comes to Jesus Christ. When we start fasting, let us fast all the way. No compromising or making deals or even cutting corners. When we

decide to pray everyday, let us actually pray everyday, no matter how tired or busy we are “But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No’ ‘No’. For whatever is more than these is from the evil one” (Matthew 5:37). All these saints that we read their stories and we try to be exemplified by their lives, “they did not love their soul even until death” (Revelation 12:11) and that is why they earned the heavenly kingdom.

C. Exertion and struggle

The third point to a successful serious spiritual life is puffing effort in it and exerting oneself to keep it burning with holy fire. One might think that the martyrs had it easy. All they needed to do is to confess their faith and in just a matter of minutes they were killed and put out of their misery and behold, they are in heaven. The truth is that martyrdom is such a powerful representation of faith that only the strong in Christ can undergo it.

During the era of persecution, a monk went to his spiritual father requesting that he would be dismissed so that he can go to the nearest city to the governor confessing his faith so as to be martyred. His spiritual father prohibited him from going and instructed him that if he prays 10 minutes twice a day, let him extend his prayers to two hours in the morning, and four hours at night. The monk, disappointed by what he had heard, decided to go get martyred despite of his spiritual father’s warning.

After a few minutes of torturing, the monk denied Jesus Christ and knelt down offering incense to the idols. Going back to the desert ashamed, the monk walked in on his spiritual father and told him what happened and asked for his forgiveness. He also asked him why he couldn’t get martyred. His spiritual father, with a fatherly look, told him that he failed because he was lazy in his spiritual life inside his cell. The spiritual father also told him, *“He, who cannot offer sweat in his room, cannot offer his blood in the arena of persecution”*.

Let us always remember that feeling Jesus Christ should be translated to something alive that we do. In other words, spiritual life is a living translation to love and feelings for God.

We are always complaining about how long the mass is and how boring praying is. We are not prepared to offer our lives for martyrdom unless we offer our personal comfort to Jesus Christ in our spiritual life in our homes. No one said that one would not get tired if he/she stands during liturgy. Let us get tired standing during liturgy; let us stand in all fear and respect while Jesus Christ Himself is being sacrificed in front of our eyes on the altar; let us exert ourselves physically and mentally to show God how much we love Him.

St. Paula of Tamoh was a 100 years old monk in the desert. One day he was doing his prostration (matanias) and suddenly Jesus Christ appeared to him and told him, “Enough struggle and strive my beloved Paula”. St. Paula raised his tears filled eyes and said, “God, I haven’t had thorns in my head or nails in my limbs, or a spear in my side. What did I offer to you of my body that is worthy enough for me to stop striving?” If Jesus Christ appears to us, what is He going to say? Is He going to tell us it is enough exerting ourselves, or is He going to say enough laziness, compromise, slumber and enough hammering more nails in His hands?

Let us always remember that God is never pleased with anything you offer from yourself but He is pleased with anything you offer of yourself. God may not be pleased if you offer him money that you can live without, but He will be pleased with just two mites like the widow who offered Him, for those two mites were out of her need. God is more pleased with the smell of sweat than the smell of incense. St. MarIsaac says, “Blessed is he whose cheeks were burned with tears of strive”.

In Church manuscripts there is a story about a circus man who asked God what he could do to live more for Him? God spoke to him and told him to go to the desert and join the monastery. God also spoke to the abbot of the monastery and instructed him to ordain that young man a monk immediately with no reservations or testing. The circus man was ordained as a monk even though he knew not how to read, how to pray, or even how to praise God. The rest of the monks got annoyed with him and asked the abbot of the monastery to kick that monk out of the monastery for he did not know how to do anything and so he was not worthy to be a monk. The abbot, seeing that the request was unanimous, instructed all the monks to go with him to tell the monk the decision. When the monks entered the Church, the abbot asked them to stand aside in a dark area so as not to disturb the monk when he comes in to pray his one final prayer, and after prayer they can go tell him the decision. The monk walked in the Church with a sack in his hand and knelt in front of the altar. He then took off his clothes and opened the sack getting out a circus custom and put it on. He also brought out of the sack three colorful balls that he twirled in the air while jumping around and shaking his hat that had bells at the end of it. The monk kept twirling the balls in the air and ringing the bells that he started sweating. Suddenly St. Mary came out of her icon and with her hands, she wiped off the monk's sweat. Shocked by such a scene, all the monks flooded the monk and asked him to forgive them for what they were about to do to him. He, looking amazed at all what is happening told them that throughout his life he knew nothing but a circus trick that he performed to people. That circus trick, which was all that he had, he decided to offer it to God in front of his altar everyday.

No matter how simple or how few are the things we can do, let us offer them to Jesus Christ. He is capable of transforming such small talents to numerous powerful gifts that are able to show God's glory to men. But let us offer all that we have to Jesus Christ not saving anything to the evil world we live in.

D. Particularity

The fourth and final point to have a successful serious spiritual life is particularity. We must be very particular in everything. We must be particular in our free time, in our senses, in our thoughts, and in our friends or else our crown will be stolen and there will be no more days to make up for lost time.

We say that we are too busy and have no time for all that spiritual stuff. We say that there is no way we can stay up all night praying, or stand up in mass for 4 hours, or even fast all day without eating anything. But unfortunately, we all do these things already but not for Jesus Christ. We stay up all night talking to friends and having slumber parties. We play basketball for hours, not just standing up, but even running and sweating. We stay up late at night talking on the phone or thinking about something not eager to eat. But how many times do we offer a fasting, not eager for it to end?

We are capable of doing all those things but unfortunately not for Jesus Christ. We live seriously in everything but not in spiritual life.

Conclusion:

Seriousness in spiritual life leads to commitment and commitment leads to success. Indecisiveness in spiritual life leads to leniency, and leniency will definitely lead to failure, no matter how small the degree of compromise in spiritual life is. With failure, condemnation and anger from the Almighty are accompanied. "I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were cold or hot. So then because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:15-16).

The Church fathers have always meditated on such a concept and always warned about the smallest glitches in our spiritual lives that are more than capable to destroy the whole structure. A huge ship is bound to sink if it has a hole in its bottom. The smallest hole will still take such a ship down. Struggling against every sin in our lives, big or small, will fortify us against defeat and will be the stepping stone towards God's grace. Beware of "the little foxes that spoil the vines" (Song of Songs 2:15).

Let us all today, actually now at this moment, stand up in prayer and raise our hearts and make a commitment to God and say to Him that no matter how strong the world rages against us, we are His' and we will never forsake Him for He never forsook us. Let us tell Him that we now have a clear goal, which is He. Let us tell Him we will persist till death in our spiritual life. Let us tell Him that we will exert our hearts, our souls and our bodies to show Him how much we love him. Let us tell Him that we will be particular in everything we do from now on. If the enemy overcomes us, let us pray to Him that He sends power from above to come and save us in a miraculous way. Through the intercession of St. Mary, and the prayers of St. Polycarp, St. Anthony, and all the martyrs that gave up their lives for Him throughout time allover the world, may God grant us a spiritual life from above. May He be the sole owner of our lives and our eternity. Amen.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER
(Starting with the Coptic New Year)

Week 2- Preparation for Martyrdom

Week 3- Christian Youth and Family Life

Week 4- Youth and Specifying a Goal

Week 2 - Preparation for Martyrdom

Objective:

- ❖ To develop the spirit of martyrdom in a Christian manner, devoid of any extremism or fanaticism

Memory Verse:

“Then I heard a loud voice saying in heaven: Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down” (Revelation 12:10).

Introduction:

I. A Historical Account Of The Various Ages Of Martyrdom

- ❖ Ever since St. Stephen offerings have been presented to express love to Jesus Christ even until today war is declared between the kingdom of the Lord and that of Satan.
- ❖ The word “martyr” means a person whose blood has been shed on account of faith. It also means someone who declares his faith and preaches the Word of the Holy Bible. Moreover, it means testifying through the observation of God’s Commandments.
- ❖ The church has adopted the year 284 AD, which marks the start of the tyrannical Diocletian reign, as the beginning of the Coptic Calendar year (the Nayrouz Feast).
- ❖ Christians were required to do two things:
 - a) Consider the emperor a god and worship him.
 - b) Bow to idols and offer incense, if only by appearance, without truly believing.
- ❖ Christians rejected such conditions for two reasons:
 - a) In Christianity, the inner core and the outward appearance are one and the same thing (Romans 10:9,10). To the heathens however, interest was on outward appearances, devoid of any belief. That is something that Christianity condemns as hypocrisy (Matthew 23:25-28).
 - b) In Christianity, the individual is granted freedom in its widest sense. As a Christian, an individual worships the Lord because he fully desires to do so. It is not because he has inherited that religion or because the law forces him.

Lesson Outline:

I. The First Question: What Are The Most Important Reasons For The Outburst Of Persecution?

A. The strong widespread of the Christian teachings was considered a threat to the heathen Roman Empire

Because the early Christians were fervently jealous in spreading the good news of the Bible, their teaching became widespread. This news and the great power with which the Christians spread to the world aroused the anger of the heathens.

B. The proclamation that Jesus Christ reigns as King over all hearts

The heathen world did not understand that the Lord Jesus said, "My Kingdom is not of this world" while at the same time He said "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Luke 20:25). This was considered a rebellion against the authority of the state, even though Christians prayed for the Emperor and his governors.

C. The conflict between good and evil

Christianity is the religion of truth and evil always resists truth (Luke 12:11,12; Luke 21:14; Matthew 18:18).

D. The clash between Christianity and heathen philosophy

St. Paul considered that the ignorance of preaching (God) is wiser than the wisdom of men and the philosophies of the world. He clarified that faith in Christ does not need worldly philosophy but the simplicity of heart and surrender of oneself to God with a deep sense of the need for Christ's salvation.

II. The Second Question: What Is The Deep Motivation For Martyrdom Through The Shedding Of Blood?

- ❖ The Cross is a sign of Christian pride, the secret of its strength and glory and bear the Cross is a condition for discipleship (Matthew 16:24).
- ❖ Christians live with a deep sense of indebtedness to God who has sought with love to suffer in order to save His loved ones from the grip of death.
- ❖ Pain has become a spiritual gift (Romans 8:17; Corinthians 1:24; Phil 1:29; Philippians 3:10).
- ❖ Pain has become a spiritual pleasure, and death has been transformed from a dreaded enemy into a beloved friend (1 Peter 4:12-14)
- ❖ If Christianity is love, then death on its behalf is the ultimate love and sacrifice.

III. The Third Question: How Do We View Martyrdom? How Have Martyrs Faced Persecution?

A. Martyrdom is a passion, a gift, and a joy (Philippians 1:29; John 16:22)

One of the ministers of Nero testified to that when he saw the martyrs singing while they stood in the hungry lions' den; the arena of martyrdom. The minister shouted at the tyrant king, saying, "My Lord, you can tear their flesh into pieces, but you cannot tear away their joy."

B. Martyrdom is courage

St. Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, wrote, “the condemned were far more courageous than their oppressors, for their beaten and torn bodies overcame the instruments used for torture”.

C. Martyrdom is a means of preaching

It has led to thriving and development of the church. The scholar, Tertullian, says, “The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church.” History, too, testifies that those who have believed due to the sufferings of martyrs are more than those who have believed as a result of preaching. This is true on account of the miracles that accompanied the death of martyrs, and their display of steadfastness, tolerance and patience.

D. Martyrdom is a proof of the truth of the Christian religion (Luke 21:12-17, Isaiah 54:17)

The Historian Chaff says, “we do not know of any other religion that has withstood the test of time like Christianity: three centuries have passed during which it has constantly endured fanaticism and yet has not depended on any material means for support” (John 16:33; John 10:19; Mark 16:17-18).

E. Martyrdom is a practical proof of Christian virtues

The pain and deep suffering could not cause martyrs to abandon their Christian virtues. The following are examples of such virtues:

- ❖ Steadfastness and long suffering: Tertullian the scholar, addressing rulers and judges said, “many of your writers have encouraged long suffering and death, but your words have not recruited followers, as has happened in Christianity”.
- ❖ Meekness: Even though there were many Christians subjects they never rebelled or threatened; some were soldiers, leaders and rulers. An example of this is the Tibeian legion, which consisted of six thousand soldiers, all of whom died as martyrs.
- ❖ Loving the enemy: Martyrs loved their enemies in obedience to the commandment of their teacher (Luke 6:27-28). St. Stephen prayed for those who stoned him: “Lord, do not charge them with this sin.”
- ❖ Purity and Chastity: One of the cruelest punishments inflicted on women martyrs was putting them in brothels. They would have rather been beheaded than lose their chastity. The story of Butamina, the pure virgin, testifies to that.
- ❖ No worldly interest: Martyrs abhorred the world in all its aspects - their wealth was taken and they were dismissed from their jobs and from public life. Many of them lived in the enormous Roman catacombs.
- ❖ Eternal love: Living their life in heaven while still in the flesh. Martyrs have longed for eternity and life in heaven, and with their great desire for eternity they saw the heavens open and saw crowns ready for them while enduring indescribable torture (Matthew 25:34).

IV. The Fourth Question: How Can We, As Youth, Testify To The Lord?

We have observed how our fathers faced death and as we study their lives we feel embarrassed and wonder, “can we become martyrs?” St. John Chrysostom replies to that and says: “Do you think that crucifixion on the cross is the only way of martyrdom? If this was true, it deprives Job of his crown.”

V. Some Landmarks Of The Road To Martyrdom

A. Testify to the Lord to counteract sin

Daniel, who was exiled to a distant country, could be the best example of testimony. He protected his heart from being enticed by the pleasures of the court. For as much as he considered himself dead to these passions, the Lord strengthened and saved him from the jealousy of the envious, and from the lion's den.

The apostle Paul calls us opponents or fighters against sin even until blood (Hebrews 12:4). St. Pachomius taught his disciples, saying, "fatigue due to constant worship and bowing constitutes martyrdom."

B. Testify to Christ to overcome your own body

When you joyfully deprive your body of the pleasure of food and control it to stay up late and pray, in this, you become martyrs (Romans 13:1; 1 Corinthians 6:20). Therefore let us begin to face our bodies so that we may offer them as a holy offering to God (1 Peter 4:1).

C. Honesty in keeping the commandments

In our practical life we often face the difficult choice of either observing the Lord's commandments in spite of any joyful suffering involved or of breaking them so as to be relieved of their burden. The Lord's commandments imply material loss, whereas their disregard implies eternal loss. Examples of such stressful choices are:

- ❖ Honesty in family life.
- ❖ Honesty during examinations.
- ❖ Honesty in helping others.

D. Testify to the Lord before your friends (1 John 2)

Youths in high school often face pressure in their family life, at school in the street, and especially among friends. They either give in to influence of their group or are attracted by their evil habits, or they successfully may observe the way to repentance. In choosing the latter attitude they live in inward peace and progress internally towards forming a personality that is both psychologically and socially mature.

How much do our alienated friends, who are far from the Lord, need strong models of the victorious life!

E. Testify to the Lord before the children of this world

Everyday, we meet people who have different principles. In fact we see the same principles shaken and confused in the twentieth century and beyond. Principles dissolved and crumbled before the wave of pride, extreme freedom, materialism, immorality, and atheism.

St. Paul the apostle realized, through the spirit, such a condition (Ephesians 4:17-19; 5:7-11).

F. Testify to the Lord before the world

An honest youth is dead to the world, for the world no longer glitters before his eyes. He finds no joy in material gain and, consequently, is not saddened by loss. Rather, he thanks God at all times; he struggles and perseveres at school or at work. He does so not on account of worldly ambition or evil competition, but for the glory and satisfaction of the Lord (1 John 2:15).

Applications:

Write out these verses and your meditation upon them.

- ❖ Testimony against the body and the world: Romans 8:8-14; Galatians 5:24; Galatians 6:14-17; 1 John 2:15-17; 1 Corinthians 6:12-20
- ❖ Testimony in crucifying the self: John 12:24-26; Mark 8:34; Luke 14:26-27; Matthew 10:37,38; 2 Corinthians 1:9-10
- ❖ Testimony by suffering: Romans 8:18-25,36; Hebrews 11:32-39; Psalm 116:12-13; 1 Peter 5:1; Philippians 3:7-11; 2 Corinthians 4:10,11; Acts 5:41; 2 Corinthians 5:1-9; Phil 1:18-23; 1 Peter 1:6,7; Hebrews 10:32-34
- ❖ Testimony by preaching: Mark 16:5-18; Luke 10:19; Acts 1:8; 2 Corinthians 5:11-14

Questions:

- ❖ Mention the causes leading to the outburst of persecution.
- ❖ How does the Church prepare its children for martyrdom?

Week 3 - Christian Youth and Family Life

Objective:

- ❖ The clarification of the meaning of a Christian family, its importance and depth, as well as the role of Christian youth in it

Memory Verse:

“Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another” (Romans 12:10).

Introduction:

The Christian family is the basis upon which the holy Church of God grows, extends, and is edified. Since the beginning of creation, the family has been the model and ideal of God’s purpose. The purpose of creating a family is to form a spiritual unity and a partnership of love, friendship, and self-giving displayed by all its members. This family would thus be a simple reflection of the unity among the three Trinities.

However, when sin entered the world it destroyed this unity. Nevertheless, God reinstated - by the death of Christ and His resurrection - a new Christian meaning of family life. This is different to the concept that an ordinary social man holds:

- ❖ Members of a human family are bound together by cooperation and loyal ties.
- ❖ Members of a church family are members in the one body united to the Head, to Christ. Thus Christ in the family is the origin, the basis, the goal, and its glory.

Lesson Outline:

VI. Functions of the Family

A. The function of love

The love expressed by all for Jesus Christ, and through such love, reciprocal love springs out among all members. The love that reigns within the hearts of the members clarifies the purpose of God in designating marriage. For truly, all that is subject to the laws of time will disappear in the divine kingdom; whereas love among the members will last eternally.

When a child grows up in a truly Christian family, he absorbs religion through his experience of love. Therefore, he becomes saturated by the spirit of respect and holiness and aspires with his whole being to God and eternity.

B. The function of finding living members of the Church of God

God has decreed: “Be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 49:25; Jeremiah 29:6; Psalm 127; Psalm 128).

When a godmother/godfather announces the Christian creed and denounces Satan at the ceremony of baptism of a child she/he becomes responsible for delivering the faith to the child. This is his/her duty until the age of maturity when the child is able to denounce the devil by his own free will and determination.

From the above the importance of family worship, of a spiritual domestic atmosphere, and ethical leadership becomes obvious. This is because the object of forming a family is to enlarge the kingdom of God that can be done by bringing in new members to share life with God. Moreover, it is the duty of a spiritual family to present the best it has (of children) as an offering consecrated for the service of the Word.

C. The function of providing good testimony before others standing outside the Church

The task of the family is to prepare saints who testify for Jesus Christ. They should bear the following features:

- ❖ Chastity, decency, and sanctity, with these, a low voice is associated.
- ❖ Generosity and hospitality to guests and strangers. That is a divine commandment (1 Thessalonians 3:2). Whatever the actual housing conditions may be, the reception of the needy and the clergy in Christian homes achieve a deeply needed Christian interaction.
- ❖ Nationalism and absence of fanaticism.
- ❖ Internal coalition and the solution of problems, due to different reactions, by prayer.

VII. The Dimensions of Family Relationships

A. Adoption

Exodus 20:12; Proverbs 6:20-23; 10:1; 13:1; 17:6; 17:25; 19:13; 23:24; 30:17.

However, adoption in the Christian sense goes beyond ethics to something more sublime (Romans 8:29). For the heavenly Father introduced fatherhood and adoption to mankind in its highest and holiest sense through the obedience of Jesus to His Father and by His coming to our world. Thus, through baptism and Jesus Christ, His Son, we are accepted as sons of God (1 Corinthians 1:9).

Our adoption, consequently, does not end at honoring our parents. Indeed, we are liberated from physical ties so that our scope for obedience widens into the ultimate obedience of Truth. This means that a son in Christianity should learn to abhor his old self - that self which is emotionally bound to physical fatherhood (Luke 14:16).

- ❖ Thus, the son honors his parents out of spiritual and not ethical motives. He loves his parents based on truth and not through family allegiance.
- ❖ Motherhood, fatherhood, and brotherhood are all expanded to include all of humanity (Mark 3:34).
- ❖ When family interests conflict with truth, we should obey God above men (Matthew 19).
- ❖ Punishment and edification are accepted as issuing from the Cross and not from men (Hebrews 7:28; Hebrews 2:10).

B. Brotherhood (Proverbs 17:17; 18:19; Psalm 119)

Human brotherhood is wonderful and God's purpose is that man lives with his brother in spiritual coexistence. Man, however, has been unable to establish union with his brother. Nevertheless, Christianity has granted man the grace of love. This is in accordance with the divine commandment to "love your God with all your heart, might, and will, and to love your neighbor as yourself."

The mystery behind our own self-rejection is the imaginary life we lead. Once we come into contact with fellow brothers, dreams quickly dissolve. Instead of repairing our ways, we reverse our anger onto them and hate them. Actually, if I am disturbed by the vanity of a fellow brother, then I am the one who is actually vain.

Undoubtedly there is pain in brotherhood and if I love my brother who hurts me, then it means that I have crucified myself, with its passions and whims. It also means that my heart has opened up to receive love poured into it by the Holy Spirit (John 13:34,35; 15:12,13). St. John the apostle teaches us the importance of this commandment of brotherly love, which Jesus Christ Himself has delivered to us (1 John 3:16). It reflects Christ's love for us and it is the best testimony of discipleship "by this all will know that you are My disciples."

That is why brotherly love is the peak of spiritual influence in the life of a person (2 John 1:6; James 1:9; 4:11; Romans 12:10; Matthew 18:15-17; Galatians 6:1,2; 1 Corinthians 8:12; 2 Thessalonians 3:14).

From the above verses, we realize that the most important brotherly interactions are embodied in the following virtues.

- ❖ Absence of vanity and absence of self-humiliation.
- ❖ Refraining from criticism and condemnation.
- ❖ Reproving mildly, correcting in a spirit of meekness, and warning with brotherly love.
- ❖ Care for weak souls to avoid overburdening them or becoming stumbling blocks for them.
- ❖ Sharing the burdens of others and their frailties while offering friendship as a testimony of love.

The isolation of the sly from among Christians by name is a sin, as well as all forms of isolation from fellow patriots as an excuse for protecting the inner spiritual life is a kind of Pharisee or concentric attitude. Being broad-minded, however, does not imply that our children should imitate the unseemly behavior of others.

If a believer suffers on account of his friendliness with his fellow brothers, then he should persevere in prayer, patience and loving acts so that the Holy Spirit may work and reconcile opposites (Ezekiel 37). It is a unique example of the power of the spirit to reconcile diversity (different members) to complement the work of the ministry and the consequent edification of the body of Christ.

Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us in the parable of the good Samaritan, that it is my brother who needs my love, mercy, and friendliness; whatever his religion, sect, or belief.

C. Marital companionship

Marital love is associated with existence and not with possession. This is true, as one partner loves the other regardless of any consideration than that of being his/her partner.

Through reciprocal love, the fallen conjugal nature is transformed into a place established in the new heaven.

D. Parenthood

Human parenthood has been greatly honored ever since the very beginning of creation. This is important in that God clarifies to us the depth of His love for us by asking us to call Him our Father. Actually, parenthood in the person of the Father was a divine commandment in the Old Testament. It was concerned with the great task of education (Deuteronomy 21:8,12; Proverbs 13:24; 19:18; 20:7; 22:6).

Scientific education underlines the most important aspects of education and the responsibilities of parents as follows:

- ❖ Parents are responsible for their children's physical health.
- ❖ Their responsibility for psychological health entails satisfying the child's need for love, tenderness, and indiscriminating treatment.
- ❖ Their responsibility for mental health by focusing on the development of imaginative and memory powers, as well as enlarging the culture and general knowledge of the child.
- ❖ Their responsibility for social education and training of the child to help others.
- ❖ Moral education, like telling the truth and being honest, sincere, and cooperative is another responsibility.
- ❖ Their responsibility for aesthetic development that implies revulsion from anything ugly.
- ❖ Their responsibility for the development of an all-rounded personality of the child.

E. Spiritual fatherhood

St. John Chrysostom sets a precondition that those who practice parenthood do so not on account of their physical birth, but on account of their spiritual birth, for while the former is doomed to destruction, the latter leads to eternity.

St. Paul the apostle says: "Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?" (1 Thessalonians 5:8). This is an example of spiritual parenthood. Moreover, it clarifies the importance of caring for members of our household.

F. Spiritual leadership

This needs to be an unbiased guidance, cautious but encouraging, as well as enlightened (1 Corinthians 3:21; Ephesians 6:4). It should not be tyrannical but motivated by love and Christian inclinations. It involves no discrimination.

A Christian family, moreover, should not prevent its youth from pursuing a life of consecration to God, thereby offering their lives as a burnt sacrifice to Him.

Week 4 - Youth and Identifying a Goal

Objective:

- ❖ To realize that our spiritual goal in life is to be children of God
- ❖ To witness to God wherever we go and whatever we do.

Memory Verse:

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).

Introduction:

Many people live to achieve temporary earthly goals that perish. They devote all their time and thoughts in achieving such goals even though, they get covered by rust or worms such as money or commerce, knowledge or lust or other lowly desires such as passionate indulgence. However, such people are rarely satisfied or gratified. After a while, they realize they have wasted their lives to achieve these goals. They wish that life would go back in time to give them another chance to choose a different goal. Unfortunately, time would be up, the door closed and the bridegroom already inside. They will find themselves thrown outside the door and deprived of the heavenly bridegroom.

The danger such people take by living without having goals is that they are swept by the different trends surrounding them. They go because they see others doing so, and they stop as they see others stop. They do not wish to see for themselves and often wonder why they are living, or why God has created them. Because they live without a purpose, they are like a ship that sails without having any destination.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Importance Of Identifying A Goal

There should be a goal and it should be identified. It should also have a defined strategy. Jesus Christ came to define your goal for you. He then holds your hand and leads you towards it. He scolds every wind, and calms every wave, so that your boat proceeds peacefully to the port, blessed by His presence inside it.

II. Clarity of the Goal

By this, we mean that a person should know exactly what he is going to do, where he is going, and how much time he will spend on his journey.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, in planning for the salvation of mankind, had a goal set before Him. St. Paul the apostle expresses this when he speaks about Christ saying, “who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 2:2). Thus the Lord came to achieve the goal He had set. He struggled to achieve it and it was motivated by His love, an inexplicable love, to save the world.

III. Identifying the Goal

When Jesus handed down His mission to His disciples He made them responsible for the whole world; they had to teach all His ways. He therefore offered Himself totally to them, thereby ensuring the realization of His goal.

- ❖ “Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matthew 28:19).
- ❖ “And you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the world” (Acts 1:8).
- ❖ “Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:20).
- ❖ “I am with you always, even to the end of ages” (Matthew 28:20).
- ❖ From the above three verses, the overall goal, its depth and its sublimity that transcends power and time, becomes clear. These last three commandments that the Lord delivered to His disciples reveal that the mission is very lengthy. In fact, it would entail all ages for its fulfillment.

As for our responsibility towards this lengthy divine mission, we should observe its comprehensiveness, which seems impossible, unless it is put within the framework of the divine Will and the assistance of Jesus Christ.

However, comprehensiveness in its full sense is hard to achieve. Nevertheless, we could serve and mark our mission by this feature when we do not discriminate among people or areas, flesh or blood, friendship or profit, moods, comfort, beliefs, or nationality.

Such a multiple population, served so completely, elevates the value of the goal. It makes it a task greater than could be confined to one man, one group, or one people. Therefore, we are required to present the Lord Jesus Christ to the entire world exactly as He has presented Himself to it.

The task of the Christian could be clarified in the following three goals. He hopes to achieve them through his contacts with the world, supported by Christ Himself as well as the Holy Bible:

First Goal: Promoting the relationship between people and God to achieve its true spiritual level.

Second Goal: Promoting man’s relationship with himself so that he becomes concerned with the salvation of his soul above all other considerations whatever those may be.

Third Goal: Promoting the relationship between man and his fellowmen in order to raise it to its original divine status, and give it priority over all other considerations.

IV. Consolidating the Goal

When a Christian succeeds in achieving his goal in society, on the basis of the above three specifications, he will find that this does not guarantee steadfastness. To ensure the strength and development of a human soul, or any group within the limits of the defined goal, a transformation must take place whereby the affected become effective. In other words, there is the need to become continually and actively alive. For every person living with Jesus Christ is required to be actively alive within the body of God. This necessitates unity with the Church and close adherence to it.

Consequently, any work undertaken by a Christian and which does not end with leading people to join the Church or end in their perseverance in prayer so that they, too, would carry the mission one of these days, would come short of achieving the goal. This is so because life with Jesus Christ is inconceivable if a person is isolated from the rest of those who live with Him.

All this is a preparation work for the greater task undertaken by a person to get spiritually unified with all people in the whole world to love them on the basis of, and through, Christ's love for everyone. That is how the responsibility of a Christian transcends the circle of Church service and moves into the circle that comprises work for the benefit of all mankind. It involves responsibility for providing the needs of all nations and peoples who are suffering or are deprived. That is the goal of Christ's mission as well as that of the Bible. It is the way that Christ has designated as the perfect picture of the Christian person. This is how man was at the beginning - in the image of God and likewise upon the Cross, the picture of Christ, Himself, crucified for the salvation of the whole world.

We are all invited to attain this picture. We can achieve it whether through our small services or larger ones within the Church. It is a possible task when the heart is prepared to receive and love every person it meets; becoming like Christ's heart and actually taking on His power to change and convert the hearts of men. In other words, as much as the task is comprehensive, it becomes a prerogative to open up one's heart. Moreover, to consolidate the goal as well as ensure its promotion, we need to exert a great effort.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF OCTOBER

- Week 1-** The Tabernacle of Meeting and its Spiritual Symbols (Part I)
- Week 2-** The Tabernacle of Meeting and its Spiritual Symbols (Part II)
- Week 3-** Treat Others as You Would Like to be Treated
- Week 4-** Christianity and Violence

Week 1 - The Tabernacle of Meeting and Its Spiritual Symbols (Part I)

Objective:

- ❖ Explaining the spiritual symbols of the tabernacle and their continuity in the Church of the New Testament.

Memory Verse:

“I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God” (Exodus 29:45).

References:

- ❖ Exodus 35-40
- ❖ Leviticus 1-10

Lesson Outline:

I. The Importance Of Studying The Tabernacle Of Meeting

- ❖ It is the symbol of the presence of the Incarnated God, which indicates His presence in the Church and His unity with her members.
- ❖ The tabernacle is a symbol of the Most High Dwelling, that is the Son of God the Incarnate.
- ❖ Divine inspiration has devoted to this topic about twenty chapters in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, it is mentioned in the Epistle to the Hebrews where it occupies two complete chapters.
- ❖ God Himself designed the tabernacle and filled the craftsmen with His Spirit. This indicates the extent to which He is concerned about the salvation and embellishment of our souls.
- ❖ The Divine Word, speaking through the mouth of St. Paul in the Epistle to the Hebrews, gives us the explanation to the symbols of the contents of the tabernacle and its parts. It mentions the following: “But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own Blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:11,12).
- ❖ In the same spirit of inspiration, the Church has interpreted the contents of the holy place (the sanctuary) and the most holy (the holiest of all) as being God, Jesus Christ being incarnated and coming from the Virgin Mary (refer to midnight prayers recited annually on Sundays and during the month of Kiahk).

II. The History Of The Tabernacle Of Meeting

There was a meeting tent mentioned in Exodus 33:7-11 which Moses had erected outside the camping place of the people of Israel, but there are no details about it. When Moses went into that tent, all the people came out and stood, each at the door of his own tent. They would watch the pillar of cloud as it rested at the entrance of the tent of the meeting while God spoke to Moses. Then they

would fall on their knees. When Moses returned to the camp, Joshua, the young son of Nun, remained inside the tabernacle and never left it.

As for the tabernacle of meeting, which is the topic we are studying here, which God designed and described, it was set up by Moses in Sinai on the first day of the second year after the people of Israel left Egypt (Exodus 40:17). It stood in the middle of the twelve tribes of Israel, whether they were traveling or resting and the glory of God rested and filled the tabernacle of meeting (after it was anointed and sanctified) in the form of a cloud that provided shade during the day and light during the night. When the cloud descended the people rested; and when it ascended, they traveled (Exodus 40:34). When the journey across the wilderness was over, the people of Israel crossed the river Jordan. They were led by the priests who carried the Ark of the Covenant and as their feet touched the water, the water parted (Joshua 3:15) so that the people could cross and enter the land of Canaan. There, the Tabernacle of Meeting was set up, first in Gilgal, then in Shiloh.

During the events that followed, the Tabernacle of Meeting was transported to other places a number of times. At one point of time the Ark of the Covenant was taken by the Philistines who kept it for seven months after which they returned it. It then remained in the house of Abinadab (a son of Aaron the high priest) for twenty years. Later, David the king and prophet transported it to the house of Obed (David's grandfather). It was then taken to the hometown of David (Bethlehem). During the reign of king Solomon, the Ark and the contents of the Tabernacle of Meeting were carried to the Altar, which he had built (2 Chronicles 5).

During the reign of one of the evil kings of Judah, the ark was removed from the altar, and the Holy Bible does not say anything about it after that. This could be due to its transportation to Babylon during the captivity and it was not returned.

III. The Purpose Of Constructing The Tent

- ❖ During the days of Moses the prophet, the tabernacle of meeting was a sign of God's presence in the midst of His people "that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). In this way, God could grant His people security and confidence.
- ❖ The tent was intended as a testimony of God's glory and a place to which people could come to worship and feel close to Him.
- ❖ The Lord God Himself dictated the rites of worship and offerings. By following these, man could experience confidence and peace of mind.
- ❖ The rites observed were symbolic and prophetic signs indicating the incarnation of the Son of God, His appearance among people and the value and importance of the redemption He would offer, as well as the atonement of sin through His holy and precious Blood.

Applications:

- ❖ Contemplate the love of God to man ever since his creation. God wishes us to be in His blessed presence at all times, and offer Him continuous thanks as we experience His companionship throughout our lives.
- ❖ Display the colored film (or slides) showing the tabernacle of meeting to stimulate interest to learn the details concerning the contents and their symbolic significance. In this way, students will be ready for the next lesson.

Week 2 - The Tabernacle of Meeting and Its Spiritual Symbols (Part II)

Objective:

- ❖ Explaining the spiritual symbols of the tabernacle and their continuity in the Church of the New Testament.

Memory Verse:

“And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am the Lord their God” (Exodus 29:46).

References:

- ❖ Exodus 35-40
- ❖ Leviticus 1-10

Lesson Outline:

I. The Parts of the Tabernacle of Meeting

A. The Outer Court of the Tabernacle of Meeting

- ❖ Its contents:
 - a) The Gate
 - b) The Altar of Burnt Offerings (the Bronze Altar)
 - c) The Bronze laver

B. The Tabernacle of Meeting

- ❖ The contents of the Sanctuary or Holy Place:
 - a) The Altar for Burning Sweet Incense
 - b) The Golden Lampstand (Candlestick)
 - c) The Table of the Showbread
 - d) The Veil
 - e) The Most Holy (the Ark of Covenant)

II. The Outer Court

A. The Gate of the Tabernacle of Meeting (Exodus 38:18-20)

- ❖ “I am the door. If anyone enters by Me he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture” (John 10:9). We have indicated that the tabernacle of meeting was intended to signal God’s presence in the middle of His people. Moreover, it offered the opportunity for the soul to enter into the presence of his creator. The person entering, however, needs to pass through a door or gate, and Jesus Christ has become that opening through which we can enter. He is the way that leads us into God’s presence and into His heavenly kingdom. Thus the door of

the Tabernacle of Meeting is a symbol of Christ in various ways. The door measured twenty cubits long, and five cubits high. It consisted of curtains hung up on four pillars.

- ❖ The curtains were made of four kinds of material:
 - a) Blue thread cloth (light blue) as a symbol of Christ's heavenly person since He is the Son of God.
 - a) Purple thread cloth (vivid red) to denote the King of Glory - purple is a royal color.
 - b) Scarlet cloth (dark red) to denote Jesus who was wounded for us.
 - c) White fine linen (twined) as a symbol of our Lord's nature – spotless and without sin - thus denoting our Redeemer.
- ❖ The curtains were hung up on four pillars made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. These stand for the love of Christ (God's Son Incarnated) and His redeeming offering that encompasses and embraces the whole earth (the four corners): *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16).*

B. The Bronze Altar (for Burnt Offering)

- ❖ This is what first meets a person entering the court and it lies on one line leading from the door of the court into the tabernacle of meeting, then into the holy place or sanctuary and into the most holy.
- ❖ The bronze altar is considered the biggest piece in the tabernacle of meeting. It was in the form of a case that was five cubits long, five cubits wide, and three cubits high. It was made of acacia wood (resistant to wood worms) overlaid with bronze. It had four protruding horns on the four corners. The altar was hollow and this became filled with fuel and ashes of the offerings presented on it. The altar had two poles made of acacia wood and overlaid with bronze, which were passed through rings found in the grate network (a frame in the form of a net all around the altar). These poles were used to carry the altar.
- ❖ All the utensils used on this altar were made of bronze. The offerings presented on it were of various kinds. The fire was never put out so that it continually burned (Leviticus 6:9). The Lord started this fire on the day of its sanctification and it was the minister's job to add dry fuel only.
- ❖ The bronze altar and all the offerings presented on it indicate Christ who suffered indictment on our behalf: *“But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (Isaiah 53:5).*
- ❖ The offering presented had to be spotless - without blemish. The sinner had to place his hands on its head and confess his sins. Then, the priest would burn it all on the altar. It was the promise God had made to forgive the sins of those who presented an offering, “sins are not forgiven without blood” (Hebrews 9:22). This promise of atonement and salvation are indicated by the horns of the altar, which stand for the power and efficacy of Christ's offering. The horns also served as a means of salvation to all those who sought refuge in them. There, they could be safe until their innocence was confirmed.
- ❖ The offering was tied to the horns of the altar before it was presented and burned. This symbolizes the tie of love, which made the Lord look towards Jerusalem and Golgotha.

- ❖ Although the offering was considered a bearer of sin upon presenting it, yet God ordered that its ashes be gathered in a pure pot. These were sprayed over sinners as means of purification (Numbers 19:9). St. Paul comments on this issue asking us to consider the efficacy of our Lord's offering on the Cross to purify and sanctify us. What a contrast this makes with the offerings made in the Old Testament!! If the blood of rams and bulls and their ashes could sanctify and purify, how much more can this offering do - the pure Blood of Jesus, the Eternal Spirit, who offered Himself without blemish. Surely, It can purify our conscience from all dead acts and prepare us to serve the living God (Hebrews 9:11-14).

C. The Bronze Laver (Exodus 30:17-21)

- ❖ The bronze laver had a base of bronze too. However, the Holy Bible does not describe its appearance or size. It was put in the outer court, between the bronze altar and the entrance to the sanctuary (the Holy and the Most Holy). It was filled with water and the priests had to wash in its water when they had to present offerings on the altar. Similarly, they had to wash before entering the sanctuary, "so that they will not die" (Exodus 30:20).
- ❖ The bronze laver symbolizes our second birth, our renewal, and purification through the mystery of baptism "As Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the Word" (Ephesians 5:25,26). It is through baptism that we become qualified to be members in the Body of Christ and to serve His Holy Name, "by offering spiritual sacrifice to the living God."
- ❖ The laver was used on the first day, then on the day of sanctification, and to appoint priests consecrating them and the utensils to be used. Therefore, all was well cleaned and washed as a symbol of our washing in baptism. Moreover, the priests had to wash their legs and feet with its water daily before drawing near the altar of burning incense or the holy place. This indicates our daily struggle to adhere willingly to God in order to preserve the purity and holiness of our being. We refer to such a stage as the life of scrutiny and repentance.
- ❖ When Christ washed the feet of His disciples before offering Himself, Peter objected and Christ told him "unless I wash you, you will not be a part of Me." And when Simon went on to ask the Lord to wash his hands and head too, the Lord said "*He who is bathed needs only to wash his feet, but is completely clean*" (John 13:10). Here, our Lord teaches us that repentance (the washing of feet) is a continual task, which reenacts the work of baptism (which we observe only once).
- ❖ In the Cross, we see the combination of both the altar and the laver "This is He who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood"(1 John 5:6). Thus, the Lord has granted us redemption and atonement by His offering. His holy Blood is a means of purification and inspires repentance.

III. The Tabernacle of Meeting

- ❖ God ordered Moses to build the tabernacle of vertical boards (ten cubits long and one and a half cubits wide). These were joined together by horizontal bars. The final dimensions were: thirty-three cubits long, twelve cubits wide, and ten cubits high. Each board was made of acacia wood (resistant to woodworm) and overlaid with gold. These would each stand in two silver sockets and would have three gold rings through which the horizontal bars were passed to hold the boards together. The whole construction symbolizes the coming together of believers, as one building, into the living altar of God; as the apostle explains, "In whom the

whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a habitation of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:21,22).

A. Coverings

- ❖ The first layer consisted of fine linen and blue, purple, and scarlet silk. We have already noted the symbolic significance of this in our study of the curtains of the door in the outer court. A cherub was embroidered and added here in the holy place. This layer symbolizes spiritual virtues, which the Lord grants to the inner soul.
- ❖ The second layer consisted of coverings made of coarse goat’s skins. Their dark color denoted the hardship believers and the Church tolerate due to external persecution. Inwardly, however, they are filled with the grace and consolation granted by God “I am dark but lovely... like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon” (Song of Songs 1:5).
- ❖ The third layer was made of rams’ skins dyed red which remind us of the leather clothes that God made for Adam and Eve to cover them up. It also points to the One who will come at the end of the days, “a lamb with no spot,” to be slain for us to cover (atone) our sins and clothe us with His righteousness.
- ❖ The last layer was a covering made of dark badger skin (a sea animal) and strongly resistant to weather conditions. It indicates the Lord’s protection and surveillance over His children, guarding them in their wanderings and estrangement and as the Holy Word says, “I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin” (Ezekiel 16:10).
- ❖ From the above, it is clear that the construction of the tabernacle and its coverings denote the Lord Incarnate, pure, holy, and appearing as the Son of Man. Some have said of Him “Is not that the Son of Joseph” and Peter said to Him: “you are Jesus, the Son of God”. The tabernacle of meeting indicates the Church as she travels in the wilderness of this world and is sunburned. Consequently, it is black (Song of Songs 1:5). However, it is lovely internally as it is “variously ornamented”. This refers to the soul of each one of us.
- ❖ God has ornamented our souls with saintly virtues, and He has become our shield repelling the fiery arrows of the wicked enemy.

IV. The Contents of the Sanctuary or Holy Place

A. The Table of the Showbread (of the Presence of God, Exodus 25:23-30, 37:10-16)

- ❖ God ordered that the table be made of acacia wood, overlaid with gold. Its dimensions were two cubits long, one cubit wide, and one and half cubit high. It had a molding of gold all around it. There were four gold rings at the four corners, and through these, poles were passed when the table was carried. On the table, twelve loaves (showbread) were put and left for the whole week. They would then be removed and replaced by twelve others. Only the priests ate of it in the holy place.
- ❖ This is the first time in the Bible where the table for serving the Lord is mentioned. It is a symbol of our Lord and Redeemer who offered Himself as the “Bread of Life.” It is also a reference to the Communion to which the Lord invites us so that we could eat and be satisfied by His blessed Person. The Lord offered Himself by giving His holy Body and Blood as food and a means of growth for us. This is possible through our communion with the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit “Our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3).

B. The Golden Lampstand (Exodus 25:31-40; 37:17-24)

- ❖ There were no windows in the tent to give light. Therefore, God commanded that a golden lampstand be used in the Sanctuary to give light. The Holy Word does not specify its dimensions, but says that it was made of pure gold which is a symbol of our Lord and Redeemer who is Light proceeding out of Light, and Truth from the God of Truth. Light is always a symbol of God's glory and divinity.
- ❖ The shape of the lampstand was as follows: It had a central shaft and three branches came out of each side. Each branch ended with a bowl used as a lamp so that there were seven lamps in all. In these bowl pure olive oil was poured and the candles were lit continually. Aaron used to add oil daily, day and night, and cleaned the bowls of the ashes with golden tongs and plates.
- ❖ As the lampstand symbolizes God who is the light of the world, it refers to the light and grace of the Holy Spirit that fills the Church -pouring blessings upon the members through the participation in the seven mysteries. The ultimate result is that members, in turn, give out light in their generation for "You are the light of the world". The Church, too, blesses the Virgin and mother of God by calling her "the mother of Light", and says, "You are the lamp that carried the true Light that shines for every person." Let us contemplate Aaron as he cleans the bowls from the ashes, and adds oil to increase the heat of the flame. He represents the grace of God working in us to bring about repentance. This is brought about as Christ extended His wounded right hand to support us. Thus we are filled by the power of the Holy Spirit within us and we should not "grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:30).

C. The Altar for Burning Sweet Incense (Exodus 30:1-10; 37:25)

- ❖ This was also made of acacia wood overlaid with gold. Its dimensions were one cubit long, one cubit wide, and two cubits high. It had horns and a molding of gold all around it. It was put in front of the veil, and Aaron burned sweet incense on it every morning and evening when he refueled the lampstand.
- ❖ The altar for burning incense is a symbol of Our Lord who "offered Himself as a sweet offering for our sakes, and the smell went up to His Father from Golgotha in the evening." A sweet smell that earned pardon and joy for us! The horns of the altar rubbed by the blood of the offering (for atonement) denotes the extent to which the offering of Christ made to redeem and save man, is efficient and powerful. The presence of the altar for burning incense in the holy place and Aaron's ministry on it denotes the task of the redeemed who offer spiritual sacrifices to God. These take the form of prayers and songs of praise as well as a life of holiness and purity; "you are the sweet smell of Christ." The songs of praise are pronounced by all those who have experienced the salvation of the Lord throughout the ages. It is important to note that the fire burning on the altar of incense was taken from the altar of burned offering for God had warned against using a foreign fire. Similarly, insincere prayers are rejected since they do not come from a heart purged by the grace of God.

D. The Veil (Exodus 26:31-33)

- ❖ The veil divided the tabernacle into two, the Holy Place (or Sanctuary) and the Most Holy. Accordingly, there were things inside the veil, like the Ark of the Covenant (or testimony), and things outside the veil, the contents of the sanctuary, the table (on the northern side of the observer looking at the veil) and the lampstand (on the southern side), as well as the altar of

incense, which stood in the center, opposite the veil. The veil was made of woven blue, scarlet and purple yarn and fine white linen thread, with cherubim designs. Components (as we have noted before) point to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ as a heavenly person. His eternal reign, His purity and His holiness. The Holy inspiration has interpreted the significance of the veil and its components through the words of St. Paul who says, “having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us. Through the veil that is, His flesh” (Hebrews 10:19-20). The design of the cherubim on the veil reminds us of the cherubim that guarded the entrance to the tree of life when God drove man out of His presence (Genesis 3:4). Consequently, it became impossible to enter the Holiest due to the obstacle of our indictment. However, Jesus Christ bore this indictment by His death and the tearing of the veil (He gave Himself on the Cross) and consecrated by His blood the way to the Holiest for us. Thus He reconciled us with the Father and renewed our nature to qualify us for the Kingdom of Righteousness. This happened at the moment of crucifixion during the earthquake when, “the veil was torn from top to bottom” (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:35). The Holy Inspiration tells us that the priesthood of Christ “remains forever” and has cancelled the priesthood of the Levites and animal offerings - which were temporary and lasted only in the Old Testament. Now, we have entered the New Testament where man appears before God, since Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is the intermediary between man and His heavenly Father, “who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (1 Corinthians 1:30). We wish to indicate that there is now nothing in the Church called the veil of the altar to divide believers from the altar or the table of the Lord. What we see standing now between the inside and the outside of the altar is called “the icon of the deacon”, or “the bearer of the icons”.

V. The Holy of Holies

- ❖ Exodus 25:10-22; 37:1-9
- ❖ Deuteronomy 10:33
- ❖ Hebrews 9:4

A. The Ark of Covenant

- ❖ God told Moses to build the ark from acacia wood two and a half cubits long, one and a half cubit wide, and one and half cubit high. It was to be overlaid with pure gold on the inside and outside, with a molding of gold all around it. Four rings, cast of gold, were put in the four corners, and two poles of acacia wood overlaid with gold were passed through the rings, on the sides by which the altar could be carried.
- ❖ The ark represented the presence of God in the middle of His people. In fact, He was their Shepherd and Leader in their march toward the land of Canaan. In the same way, the priests carried the ark and led the people in their journey.
- ❖ It was called the Ark of the Covenant (Deuteronomy 31:26) in reference to the blood of the covenant, which allowed the priests, once a year to approach the ark to obtain God’s blessing and confirm the promise of mercy and forgiveness. God also called it the Ark of the Testimony, as He commanded Moses to put in it the Tablets of the Covenant, on which the Ten Commandments were written. Later God commanded the priests to put the golden pot that contained manna there also as a testimony, before the people of Israel, a sign of His mercy upon them in the wilderness.

- ❖ The budding rod of Aaron was put into the ark as a sign of the consecration of priesthood to Aaron and his sons by God's command.

B. The Mercy Seat

- ❖ The Ark had another part of special importance and that was the mercy seat. God commanded that it be made of pure gold with two cherubim of gold at its ends. The cherubim stretched their wings above, covering the mercy seat and facing each other. God told Moses, *"there I will meet with you and I will speak with you from above the mercy seat, between the two cherubim which are on the Ark of the Testimony, of all the things which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel"* (Exodus 25:22). The relationship between the Ark and its cover is interpreted in the prayer of praise recited on Sunday at midnight in the Church, "you, Mary, are the Ark. You were taken from among mankind pure (wood resistant to woodworm), protected by grace (overlaid with gold on the outside and inside), and carried the Son of God (the pure gold cover), who is praised and bowed to by the heavenly ranks (the cherubim). These surround and cover you as you have become the seat of God and the second heaven."
- ❖ The cover was called the place of atonement or the mercy seat because it concealed the commandments. These were a testimony against man who had walked away from God's law and forsaken the way of Jesus Christ and all that it offers: atonement, redemption, forgiveness of sins and trespasses, "I do not remember your Sins any more, as they have been thrown in the river of forgetfulness." It is also called the mercy seat in reference to the blood of the offering, which the priest put on the cover on the day of the great atonement (Leviticus 16). We notice that the blood was sprinkled only once. This was enough since Christ offered Himself once only and 'provided eternal redemption'. However, the blood was sprinkled seven times before the mercy seat, facing eastwards towards the priest and the people. This would underline their confidence in the perfect value and power of the blood of the offering in gaining the favor of God.
- ❖ The people of Israel knew that the pot of manna was inside the Ark. However, it was hidden from them for they had humiliated God when they protested against the great gift of the manna and said, "We are fed up with this unreasonable bread." Now, it was as though the divine inspiration was announcing to them that they were not worthy of eating of the Tree of Life, Jesus Christ the "True Manna" and the Bread descending from heaven. It is He who offers Himself as our food in the wilderness of this life. He is the promised life to anyone who is convinced by Grace that he will receive the true and satisfying food, "to him who overcomes I will give some of the hidden flashing sword to guard the way to the tree of life". No human being dared to approach, as he was unworthy. Here, we see the cherubim bowing their faces towards the mercy seat in appreciation of the blood offered for atonement.
- ❖ Based on it, a believer approaches confidently the throne of grace. Praise be to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ through whom we have been reconciled with God. Through Christ we have become courageous and bold and can enter the holy place and the most holy.

Applications:

- ❖ Contemplate the feeling of the people in the Old Testament as they approached in awe, the tabernacle of meeting, yet unable to enjoy ministry inside it. On the other hand, contemplate the joy we experience as we enter the Holiest of all since we have been invited to the wedding

ceremony of the Son. We have been invited to His holy table, to partake of His holy Blood and Flesh so that we may live in Him forever, and that is according to His good will.

- ❖ Use slides, films, and cassettes to explain and simplify lesson.
- ❖ Ask the youth to join in making models of the different parts of the tabernacle then contemplate its various aspects.
- ❖ Ask the youth to draw parts of the tabernacle on boards of wood, or produce a wall magazine. In this way, art is associated to Bible lessons as well as ecclesiastical and spiritual matters.

Week 3 - How to Treat Others

Objective:

To grow closer to God through:

- ❖ Sensitivity to others' needs and feelings.
- ❖ Loving our neighbor.
- ❖ Learning how to love, forgive, accept, and encourage others.

Memory Verse:

“Wherefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us to the glory of God” (Romans 15:7).

References:

- ❖ The Gift of Forgiveness - Dr. Charles Stanley

Scripture Readings:

The Old Way: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

The New Way: “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-47).

Introduction:

Dealing with others is not always easy. One can experience anger, frustration, and anxiety since not every one (including us) appreciates or understands the Christian Way. Let us discuss some situations that you might face or experience on a daily basis. What would you do if:

1. Someone cuts you off in traffic.
2. A friend spreads slanderous words about you.
3. You saw your classmate cheating.
4. Your roommate has his/her Girl/boy friend spend the night with them in the same bed.

These are just a few examples and hopefully by looking at our Lord Jesus Christ's treatment of the sinful woman, the Samaritan, and by studying the Parable of the Prodigal Son, we will be able to find the answers and comfort.

Lesson Outline:

I. Love

A. Our lives can't reflect God's love unless we learn to love others

- ❖ “He that says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in the darkness until now. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and there is no cause for stumbling in him” (1 John 2:9-10).
- ❖ “If someone says ‘I love God’ and hates his brother he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” (1 John 4:20).
- ❖ Our Lord has given us a very easy prescription on the road to complete Love. He gave us our brothers and sister so we can practice Loving those whom we can see so we can Love the Unseen God, who Himself is Love and the source of Love.
- ❖ Do people know you are Christian? Or those around you saw you as a “religious fanatic.” There wasn't anything particularly different about your life other than it was spent at church on Sundays
- ❖ St. Paul saw that same type of attitude developing among the church in Corinth, which is why he sent out this stern warning:
- ❖ “If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1).
- ❖ Our walk with Christ doesn't set us apart if we don't have love. We're just an annoying noise drifting through the air, unable to minister God's love to anyone.
- ❖ The Lord Jesus even stressed this point: “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

B. Love is the bond of unity

- ❖ When we love people, we can soften their hearts and touch their lives in unique ways “Beyond all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity” (Colossians 3:14).
- ❖ Now, if there is a situation where you have to separate from your brother or sister then follow the example of Abram who gave Lot the first choice and he accepted whatever is left over. Review Genesis 13:1-13, in particular pay attention to verse 8: “So Abram said to Lot: Please let there be no strife between you and me, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen; for we are brethren.”

C. Love brings joy to our lives

- ❖ The world would certainly be a lonely place without God's love. Without God, we have no purpose, no meaning, and no destiny for our lives. Our lives would take on a whole new meaning -no meaning at all. We would wander aimlessly through life, desiring for something or someone to love us and give us hope and purpose for our lives. Many people who haven't discovered the love of God are wandering around right now in search of this missing ingredient to make their life complete.
- ❖ “Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may remain in you and that your joy may be made full” (John 15:9-11).

D. Importance of Love

- ❖ Do you desire to know God more deeply? Do you want to understand Him more, understand His heart? Do you want to know why He does what He does? In order to do so, we must strive to know more about His love, applying it to our everyday lives. So, why is love so important in understanding God?
- ❖ However, God's love may be difficult to understand. We can understand loving our parents, son or daughter, brother or sister. Although more often than not, we don't easily love our fellow employees, the maniac driver who cuts us off in traffic, our obnoxious neighbor, or Sister "Better-than-you" from church. But God does. His love is unconditional and not based on anything we do.

II. Forgiveness

Here are some basic steps to help move you toward a Christ-centered response.

A. Forgive the offender

Hurt turns into bitterness and an unforgiving spirit when it isn't dealt with properly. Think of it this way that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, you have the spiritual resource to truly forgive others (Matthew 18:21-35; Psalm 32:1; Ephesians 4:32). When you release someone from the debt he or she owes you, you are free to see that person as Christ does, and anger and bitterness no longer have the power to rule your decisions. You also will feel that you were behind the bars of bitterness and hatred and anger, and forgiveness open the doors of prison and you "the prisoner" are let free.

B. Seek first to understand before you seek to be understood

- ❖ Practice the skill of being a good listener and try to imagine the perspective of the offender. What might have been his motivations? What is going on in his life right now? Many times, a person who hurts you is the victim of hurt himself. He feels that the only way to release that anger and "get back at the world" is to do the same thing to someone else. The process of loving someone enough to ask questions and hear the other side does not mean excusing the behavior. You must still recognize the person's action as wrong and hurtful and then forgive, but understanding the offender's private pains could be a key step towards reconciliation or preventing further conflicts in the future.
- ❖ In keeping with a spirit of Christ like love, speak with non-combative yet truthful words. A perfect verse to keep in mind at such times is Ephesians 4:29: "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers". Speaking in love does not mean that your words will not be sharp and pointed; sometimes truth is very unsettling, and the individual who has come against you may need to grapple with some tough issues.
- ❖ If you think the conversation may be difficult, or if you are unsure of the right approach, consult with your father of confession first. It is always helpful to keep the overall goal in mind.
- ❖ In any conflict, you need to realize that the outcome is not in your hands. No matter how hard you may try, you ultimately cannot force someone to listen or change. Only the Lord can work with that person's heart, as you continue to extend patience and love. Who knows, maybe someday your "worst enemy" could become your best friend in Christ. Whatever the

result, you can be sure of God's blessing as you seek His way of dealing with those who hurt you.

III. Acceptance

- ❖ Accept every one in love, from the man who cuts you off in traffic to the former friend who spreads slanderous words about you. When you are hurt by these thoughtless or deliberate wounds of others, how do you typically react? Honestly? It's no fun to be hurt. The old sandbox saying of "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" simply isn't true. Physical injuries heal over time for the most part, but the bruises from emotional conflicts do not disappear over time without specific, spiritual remedies.
- ❖ From a worldly perspective, it is considered normal to react in the "don't get mad, get even" philosophy. That is part of the reason why Jesus tells us that our behavior, as those who belong to Him, must be radically different in order to get the attention of a hurting world. Jesus says: "But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who spitefully use you. **And just as you want people to do to you also do to them likewise.** But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them... But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He is kind to unthankful and evil. Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful... Give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:27-38).
- ❖ Loving both the unlovely and the unloving is not easy. Jesus did not say that this response would come naturally. If it did, He would not spend so much time explaining these principles and the importance of following His example in your dealings with those around you.
- ❖ Remember, acceptance does not mean accept the wrongdoing of your roommate, or the wrong "life style" of your co-worker. You accept the person not the behavior. Christ loves the sinners to bring them to repentance. However, He did not accept their sins, remember He told the woman who was caught in adultery, "go and sin no more".

IV. Encouragement

- ❖ What does encouragement mean to you? Can you recall a time when someone came alongside you for the sole purpose of lifting your spirits or making you smile?
- ❖ Have you ever done that for a hurting person? It feels good to know you're loved. It feels especially good in those low moments when you can't see ahead clearly, when you don't grasp God's perspective and vision for your life.
- ❖ There's no such thing as a person who doesn't need encouragement. The individual who claims to be above "simple-minded comfort," or who seems completely unreceptive to it, is likely the one in the direst need of it. God's Word is filled with important principles that can be applied to building up others' hearts.
- ❖ The prayer of your heart can be the same as St. Paul's, who longed for all believers to know the sweetness of united fellowship. He prayed "that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all riches of the full assurance to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ" (Colossians 2:2).

- ❖ It's crucial to always speak graciously and politely, the way you want others to speak to you. The issue of communication is paramount in every arena of life. Colossians 4:5-6 says "Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one".
- ❖ It's not always easy to use gentle words, particularly in a situation in which you must confront someone about an uncomfortable issue or when the person is antagonistic or abrasive to you. If you ask the Lord to set a guard over your tongue, He will give you discretion in what to say and what to withhold (Psalm 141:3).
- ❖ A common pitfall of misguided encouragers, however, is the temptation to flattery. Complimenting someone's appearance or abilities is a good thing, when it is done for the purpose of genuine appreciation without seeking gain for oneself. If every time you see someone you feel the urge to find something to compliment about that person, analyze your motives. No one trusts or believes a continual stream of empty praise, so make sure that your compliments are sincere, sparing, and designed to encourage at appropriate moments.

Applications:

We discussed important and difficult issues in the Christian life. Many motivational speakers, courses, and seminars try to deal with forgiveness, acceptance and encouragement and may succeed to a certain extent. However the most difficult topic of all is Love. The word love is probably the most abused and misunderstood in the world. Many equate love to romance, lust or a one-way street to get ones desires without any commitment or responsibilities. Love in the Christian Doctrine is:

- ❖ Love is God and God is unlimited, therefore it is a life long journey to get closer to God, and to experience His love. Our hearts can flow with love after it has been filled by His love first.
- ❖ Love is very important in all aspects of our life but in particular in our family life. Love in the family means to put others before you and their needs before yours, it is to be the last in the family. The Christian family is modeled according to the love of Christ to the Church, which is unlimited and unselfish love.
- ❖ True Love has no expectations. Many times our relationships are built on how we exchange feelings, visits, gifts... etc. However our Lord loved us to the end. He is the Lover of Mankind for no reward or expectations.

Conclusion:

If we are really looking for love we have to look to our Master and learn to be the last and the servants in all aspects of our life. It is a long and never ending journey.

Week 4 - A Conference: "Christianity and Violence"

Objective:

- ❖ Training students in living a Christian life marked by meekness and devoid of cowardice, subjugation or humiliation.

Memory Verse:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).

References:

- ❖ The life of Jesus Christ.
- ❖ The life of St. Paul.
- ❖ The life of John the Baptist.
- ❖ Bible verses which clarify the absence of contradiction between meekness and strictness or firmness. We need to train our children to abstain from practicing violence in their lives and to face its different forms with meekness that befits the children of saints.
- ❖ The following are only some of the situations that might be raised during discussions: Matthew 12:18-20; 26:51-53; Luke 9:54-56.

Lesson Outline:

I. Christian Youth and Violence

- ❖ Psychological studies underline the tendency of violence in most youth, especially in males. This is compatible with the surging instincts in their bodies, and the ambitions filling their beings, as well as their ultimate requirements and the tendency to seek to fulfill them at whatever cost.
- ❖ However, Christian youth pose an opinion about violence drawn from the attitude of Jesus Christ Himself where He rejects violence in all its aspects.

II. The Teachings of Jesus Concerning Violence

- ❖ Our Lord rejected violence for He said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). He also preached and said, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God" (Matthew 5:9).
- ❖ Again, He said, "Whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matthew 5:39). To His apostles, He said, "I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves, therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10:16).
- ❖ St. John Chrysostom comments upon this saying, "you can be a savage wolf and unwilling to be meek as sheep, but you cannot be of Christ's fold because He is the shepherd of sheep and not of wolves."
- ❖ Jesus rejects violence in His life: When He was interrogated by the religious leader of the Jews, the latter asked Him about His disciples and His teachings. Jesus courageously

answered that He taught in public. At that point, one of the soldiers hit Jesus, according to the gospel of St. John, and said to Him “Do You answer the high priest like that? Jesus answered him, ‘If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?’” (John 18:22-23). It is important to stop for a while and meditate on the words of Jesus. Jesus did not turn the other cheek to the soldier who hit Him, neither did He reveal any sign of humiliation, subjugation, or depression in his reaction. However, He did put an end to the man’s aggression by using a tone characterized by meekness and manliness, as well as being awesome and sublime. This underlines that meekness of a Christian is not due to cowardice but rather to forgiveness arising from spiritual ability and power. These characteristics enable a Christian to overcome his own weakness and physical nature. When the Lord was crucified, He faced the worst form of hatred with ultimate love as He called aloud, on the Cross and prayed on behalf of His murderers.

III. The Church at the Time of the Apostles is a Practical Model of Meekness

The first Christians followed the model set by their Teacher (Matthew 11:29). Consequently, they did not revolt against their persecutors. In fact, they achieved the biggest spiritual revolution by offering a testimony of blood without any hatred. For example, Saint Barbara prayed for the governor and her father who commanded that she be made to suffer. Philemon and Apollonius also prayed for the governor, Arianos of Ansana. Upon their martyrdom, the latter took dust from their graves and rubbed his ailing eyes and they were instantly healed. Thus he was transformed from a cruel persecutor to a great martyr.

IV. Why Does Christianity Reject Violence?

- ❖ Violence rejects love since it considers a person like an object that should be destroyed rather than someone who should be respected.
- ❖ Violence is weakness because it fears others, while meekness is strength, and love is power and perfection.
- ❖ Violence disregards man’s humanity, while Christianity strengthens it and opposes contempt for others.
- ❖ Violence involves pride since it involves exaggerated self-confidence, while the meek tolerates discussion and listens to others.

V. Does Society Reject Violence?

Yes, civilized societies reject violent actions and consider those who react with hostile attacks as savage. Consequently, society judges and condemns both the aggressor and the violent defender.

VI. Why Meekness?

Because by facing violence with meekness, we allow love to enter the heart of the violent through our own living testimony of true love.

VII. Christian Meekness Implies True Power

- ❖ Christian meekness is not due to wavering, for it does not oppose security, firmness or steadfastness in standing for the truth. Strictness is required to shake our hardened consciences.

- ❖ Jesus was firm without bearing any hatred in many instances (check Matthew 17:17; John 3:13-16).
- ❖ Meekness does not mean making compromises or bargaining with evil or making peace with the wicked, because it arises from love and truth.
- ❖ Dear youth, let all your energy, keenness, jealousy and ambition be blessed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit. May the only violence you experience be the violence of love and testimony to the truth.

Applications:

- ❖ Train students to practice meekness in their family life as well as at school and in national service.
- ❖ Train students to praise meekness and to prefer it to cruelty and violence.
- ❖ Record this conference in the magazine of the parish as a useful practical reference to all youth.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER

Week 1- Atheism

Week 2- The Orthodox Church History

Week 3- Man from a Christian Prospective

Week 4- Cults: Jehova's Wintnesses

Week 1 - Atheism

Meditation:

God is close to all that call on Him sincerely. He fulfills the desires of those who reverence and trust Him. He fills our lives with good things. Let us be sheltered by You, O Lord, who is above all.

Objective:

- ❖ To know what atheists believe.
- ❖ To learn how to answer them and give them proof of God's existence.

Memory verse:

“Seek the Lord while He may be found. Call upon Him while He is near” (Isaiah 55:6).

References:

- ❖ Norman Geisler, “Christian Apologetics”.
- ❖ Phillip Bishop, “Evidence of God in Human Physiology”.

Introduction:

The word “atheism” comes from the negative ‘a’ which means ‘no’ and ‘*theos*’ which means ‘god.’ Hence, atheism in terms means ‘no god.’ Basically, atheism is the lack of belief in a god and/or the belief that there is no god.

Lesson Outline:

David the psalmist calls anyone a fool who says in his heart: “There is no God.” (Psalm 14:1), and behaves accordingly: “They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none that does good”. He condemns the wicked man who in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts” (Psalm 10:4).

I. Some Basic Beliefs Of Atheism

- ❖ There is no God or devil.
- ❖ There is no such thing as sin.
- ❖ The universe is materialistic and measurable.
- ❖ Evolution is scientific fact.
- ❖ Ethics and morals are relative.

Atheists do not deny God's existence because they really do not feel He exists, but instead they DO NOT want God to exist. Atheists do not want God to exist because God does not approve of their sinful actions from which they receive pleasure. So atheists say God does not exist to deceive others into thinking they have the freedom to sin.

Atheists have a very limited scope of knowledge since they only accept things, which they can see with their dim eyes. If things point to God, they claim that there is something out there that will prove

it by additional experiments or testing, like the case of extraterrestrials (which of course does not exist).

Atheistic scientists use all their advanced technological equipment to probe space and to send out powerful signals hoping to find any trace of intelligent life on other planets. Most already have the inclination that there are other rational creatures other than just humankind. This disposition is absent of any kind of proof; yet atheistic scientists are willing to believe it. On the contrary, atheistic scientists do not, and will not, even develop the inclination that angels and demons exist. If someone merely informed scientists that some intelligent life was found, they would believe that lie before they believe God exists. Atheistic scientists believe intelligent beings in outer space exist without factual evidence, but reject the overwhelming proof of the existence of God.

II. Evidence of God's Existence

A. "Just Right" universe

Our Earth is perfectly designed for life. It's the "just right" size for the atmosphere we need. Its size and corresponding gravity hold a thin, but not too thin, layer of gases to protect us and allow us to breathe. When astronaut John Glenn returned to space, one of the things that struck him was how thin and fragile our atmosphere is (only 50 miles above the Earth). Earth is the only planet we know of that contains an atmosphere that can support human, animal, and plant life. The fact that we live on a "just right" planet in a "just right" universe is evidence that a loving God created it all.

B. Moral values

Certain values can be found in all human cultures, a belief that we act in certain ways because it is the right thing to do. Murdering, lying, cheating and stealing are wrong. Where did this universal sense of right and wrong come from? If we just evolved from the apes, and there is nothing except space, time, and matter, then from where did this moral sense of right and wrong arise?

A moral sense of right and wrong is not connected to our muscles or bones or blood. The reason all human beings start out with an awareness of right and wrong, the reason we all yearn for justice and fairness, is that we are made in the image of God, who is just and right. The reason we feel violated when someone does us wrong is that a moral law has been broken -- and a moral law could not have existed without a moral lawgiver.

C. Evidence of design implies a designer

William Paley, the English theologian, made a compelling argument years ago that the intricacies of a watch are so clearly engineered that it cannot be the product of nature: a watch demands a watchmaker. In the same way, the more we discover about our world and ourselves, the more we see that like an expertly-fashioned watch, our world and we ourselves have been finely crafted with intentional design. And design implies a designer.

Probably the greatest evidence of design in creation is DNA, the material of which our genes are made, as well as the genetic material for every living thing on the planet. DNA is a highly complex informational code, so complex that scientists struggle hard to decipher even the tiniest portions of the various genes in every organism. DNA conveys intelligent information; in fact, molecular biologists use language terms -- code, translation, and transcription - to describe what it does and how it acts. Communication engineers and information scientists tell us that a code could not have existed without a code-maker, so it would seem that DNA is probably the strongest indicator in our world that there is an intelligent Designer behind its existence.

Those who deny the evidence of a designer are a lot like the foolish fisherman. If he fails to catch a fish, he says, “Aha! This proves there are no fish!” He does not want to consider the possibility that he might be an inept fisherman. Since science cannot measure the intangible or the supernatural, there are many people who say, “Aha! There is no Creator.” Foolish fishermen deny the evidence that God exists although He has left His fingerprints all over creation.

D. The reliability of the Bible

Every religion has its own holy book, but the Bible is different from all the others. It is to be the very Word of God, not dropped out of the sky but God-breathed it and infused it with His power as He communicated His thoughts and intent through human writers.

About forty different writers, on three different continents, wrote the Bible over a period of 1500 years. They addressed a wide variety of subjects, and yet the individual books of the Bible show a remarkable consistency within themselves. There is a great deal of diversity within the Bible, at the same time displaying an amazing unity. It presents an internally consistent message with one great theme: God’s love for man and the great lengths to which He labors to demonstrate that love.

One other aspect of the Bible is probably the greatest evidence that God exists and that He has spoken to us in His holy book: fulfilled prophecy. The Bible contains hundreds of details of history, which were written well in advance of their fulfillment. Only a sovereign God, who knows the future, can write prophecy that is accurately and always - eventually - fulfilled. Fulfilled prophecy is just one example of how God shows He exists and that He is not silent. How else do we explain the existence of history written in advance?

Applications:

- ❖ Look around you and meditate on the many evidences you find that prove God’s existence.

Conclusion:

- ❖ God exists. He made a just right universe that is stamped with the fingerprints of its Maker.
- ❖ People have a strong moral streak because we are made in the image of a moral God.
- ❖ The evidence of the design of our bodies, our world and the universe is a signpost pointing to a loving, intelligent Designer behind them all.
- ❖ The unity of the Bible and the hundreds of fulfilled prophecies in it show the mind of God behind His creation.
- ❖ Jesus is the clearest evidence of all that God does exist.

Week 2 - The Orthodox Church History

Objective:

- ❖ To learn about the Orthodox Church as an apostolic and an original church.
- ❖ To understand the difference between the Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian churches.

Memory Verse:

“All scriptures is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine” (2 Timothy 3:16).

References:

- ❖ Introduction to the Coptic Orthodox Church - Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty
- ❖ The story of Christianity- A celebration of 2000 years of faith - Michael Collins.
- ❖ A time line of church history: www.execpc.com/SaintIgnatius/timeline.html.

Introduction:

The Orthodox Church is the oldest church in Christianity. On the other hand, it is new to most North Americans. It is the second largest body in Christianity with close to 225 million people worldwide. Her history can be traced in unbroken continuity all the way back to Christ and the apostles. The faith of this church has been protected by millions of martyrs along the history, that she has often been called “the church of the Martyrs”.

Lesson Outline:

For the first 450 years the church was essentially one. Five historic Patriarchal centers-Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria and Constantinople; formed a cohesive whole and were in full communion with each other. An important division took place in 451 AD during the council of Chalcedon. Then, in 454 AD, the Roman Patriarch pulled away from the other four, pursuing his long-developing claim of universal headship of the church.

I. The Main Events In Church History

- **29 AD**: Pentecost.
- **49 AD**: Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15)- Dispute about the circumcision of the gentiles is resolved. St. James presides as bishop.
- **61 AD**: St. Mark arrival in Egypt and the beginning of Christianity when Anianus the cobbler believed in Christ.
- **68 AD**: The martyrdom of St. Mark in Egypt.
- **70 AD**: The destruction of Jerusalem and its temple by the Roman emperor Titus, after 4 years of Jewish rebellion against the Roman Empire. Today, only the Western Wall of the temple remains.
- **100 AD**: The apostolic age and the first period of the Christian church ends.

- **249 AD:** The beginning of vicious persecution against the Christians at the time of Decius. Yet, by the end of the second century, Christianity has spread across much of the Roman Empire.
- **300 AD:** The great persecution during Diocletian and Galerius era. Several Christian communities and villages were wiped out in Africa, Egypt and Palestine.
- **313 AD:** Constantine the Great issued the “Edict of Milan” granting freedom of worship to all religions and the first church was built.
- **251-356 AD:** St. Anthony started monasticism in Egypt, which subsequently spread, to the whole world.
- **590 AD:** in the East, Muslims pushed westward, ending Christian dominance in North Africa and Palestine the birthplace of Christianity.
- **1517AD:** Martin Luther starting the Protestant reformation.

II. The Council of Chalcedon 451 AD

There are seven authoritative councils in the history of the church. These are Nicene I (325 AD), Constantinople I (381 AD), Ephesus (431 AD), Chalcedon (451 AD), Constantinople II (553 AD), Constantinople III (680 AD), and Nicene II (787 AD). The council of Chalcedon is an important ecumenical council that divided the church to Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian churches. St. Dioscorus, the pope of Alexandria at that time defended the belief of our church about the one incarnate nature of the Word of God (Miaphysis). The meaning of mia- is one, but not single one or simple one but “unity one” out of the Divine and the human natures of our Lord Jesus Christ without absorption or confusion of any of the natures. Our church is considered a non-Chalcedonian because we refused the theology accepted at this council that considered the one nature of Christ as one of two that were absorbed together

III. Egypt And Its Unique Church

If we look to the circumstances of the Church of Alexandria (Egypt), Mrs. Butcher says that if there are seven wonders in the world, the existence of the Church in Egypt is one of the wonders in this world! The secret of all this, is the divine promise “*Blessed My people Egypt*” (Isaiah 19:25), and the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to it.

To Egypt and not a single nation, Joseph came to build warehouses and fulfill the needs of the Egyptians and others during the famine. And only to it, the Lord Jesus Christ escaped to build with His presence a holy altar and make from it a unique church which Isaiah the prophet has prophesied about (Isaiah 19).

IV. What Was The Church In Egypt Known For?

1. **A refuge to the Lord Jesus Christ:** The Baby Jesus has escaped to it, with His mother and St. Joseph, riding on a light fast cloud (Isaiah 19:1), destroying its idols, and made of it a blessed people. It is the only one, which had this divine promise. “*Blessed My people Egypt*” (Isaiah 19:25). The Church of Alexandria is still proud of her Christ, hiding inside her, and she hides in Him.
2. **An Apostolic Church:** Established by St. Mark the Apostle, and she has preserved the evangelical and apostolic thought, rejecting every criticism to the holy Bible, sanctifying the word of the Lord which is inspired by the Holy Spirit.

3. **A Knowledge-Loving Church:** The first Christian school in the world was the School of Alexandria. It embraces knowledge, study and research. It does not resist science and philosophy, but sanctifies all knowledge to the account of the heavenly Kingdom. Several great Christian philosophers have risen in it, like St. Pantaenus, St. Clement of Alexandria and Athenagoras, the deans of the School of Alexandria.
4. **An Evangelic and Biblical Church:** She led the whole world in the explanation of the word of God. In the second century, Origen the Egyptian was considered the prince of the Bible's explanation. He has affected everybody, even those who resisted and fought him.
 - ❖ The Holy Bible for our Church, is a living life, there is no separation between studying and the daily biblical experience.
 - ❖ In all her dialogues with the heretics, the church relies on the Holy Bible, as it presents the final precise decision to each dogma.
5. **A Courageous Church:** She offered whole cities to martyrdom, while praising the Lord joyfully like the city of Esna and Ikhmim. She was and still exporting to the Paradise endless numbers of martyrs since her beginning and until these days. Her balance of martyrs is increasing representing a source of strength and support in her struggling.
6. **An Ascetic Church:** She is the leader of the Christian world in the monastic movements with all its different kinds, like the hermitage system by St. Anthony, the cenobite (communal) system by St. Pachomius, and the group system by St. Makarius the Great and St. Amoun. In her asceticism, she does not despise the human body, but sees in it a special sanctity, believing that it shares with the soul its eternal glory. That is why the leaders of monasticism in spite of their ascetic level they achieved, request the believers to be moderate in their monastic life, each according to his level, and his aim is to unify with God in His Only-Begotten Son with the Holy Spirit.
7. **An Eternal Church:** She sees the gates of heaven widely open, carrying her children's heart to heavens experiencing the pledge of eternity in their prayers and fasting and all their worships while they are still on earth.
8. **A Preaching Church:** Lasted for many long centuries deprived from meeting the external world, but the spirit of preaching is inside her, nothing can destroy it. Now, it headed to preach in Africa, hoping that she witnesses her Christ in every single location. With the true spirit of humbleness with a fiery biblical jealousy, and a true motherly feeling towards every person in the world.
9. **A Church of Saints:** She is rich with her saints through all generations, and stays in communion with the saints as live members, sharing with the strugglers their love and prays for them, sharing with them the spirit of true unity. They enjoy communion with the heavenly hosts, as friends meeting them and sharing with them their praise and their divine life.
10. **A Church appreciating Human Soul:** She respects the infants and children and does not underestimate their lives and beliefs. They have the right to join the church through baptism, the holy confirmation, and sharing communion. She does not despise those little ones, but is proud of them and their fellowship in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of all.
11. **A Mother Church:** One of her main strength that she practices the true motherhood through her unity with God, the Father of mankind. One of the marks of this motherhood, that the priest enjoys fatherhood, not to work as an employee but he is a father, nothing will deprive him, no sickness nor aging can stop him from being a father to his people until the last breath in his life. He heads towards heavens with a wide heart full of love. As St. John Chrysostom says: "You priest are the father of the whole world'."

12. **A Church with Straight Faith:** Solid in her faith in the Holy Trinity, who does not concentrate once on the works of the Lord Jesus Christ and another on the works of the Holy Spirit. It is a Trinitarian who stresses continuously and in a practical manner on the love of the Father, opening His bosom to every single person who can find a spot in. And on the Lord Jesus Christ as the Savior, Heavenly Friend and the Head who grants us share His glory. She also concentrates on the Fiery Holy Spirit, inflaming the heart with the fire of divine love, granting the human being a renewal of his nature to become an icon to Christ. Preparing himself as a bride for her Heavenly Groom, receiving her dowry while she is still on earth.
13. **A Rejoicing Church:** Among her Sufferings, she always celebrates every day a feast or more. Major Lord's Feasts related with the salvation incidents the Lord has offered, or feasts of martyrs, saints or heavenly hosts. In all this she desires that the true believer may practice his daily life like a continuous endless feast, seeing in Jesus Christ the secret of his rejoice which the whole world can never take from him.

Conclusion:

We should be proud to be members in such great church. We need to know as much as we can about the history of our church.

Applications:

- ❖ Research the role of St. Cyril and St. Dioscorus in defending the faith of our church.
- ❖ Although our church is a very old and original church in history it is new to North America. It is our role to make her and her faith known to others.

Week 3 - Man from a Christian Prospective

Objective:

- ❖ Learning about the ultimate goal of the creation of man.
- ❖ God has a certain message for man.

Memory Verse:

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).

References:

- ❖ Genesis 1:31; 2:7-25
- ❖ Psalm 8:4-8
- ❖ Ephesians 2:10
- ❖ 1 Corinthians 16

Introduction:

Stimulate interest in the topic by posing a question. “Is man a divine being or an earthly one?” We would answer this question if we could define the reason for the creation of man. God is Love and consequently, He wishes to create beings with whom to set up a tie of love, to introduce them into His life and joy. This is what is meant by the glory of God: that man should live and be happy. St. Ambrose accordingly says! “The glory of God is the life of man.”

It is also useful to discuss the above verses and draw the main points as discussed below.

Lesson Outline:

I. Man Is An Image Of God

- ❖ Notice the difference between what God said upon creating man and what He said when He created all other creatures.
- ❖ It seems that “in our Image” denotes free will and reasoning (understanding himself and what surrounds him). Freedom fills a person with a sense of responsibility and underlines that we are God’s children. Therefore, we are able to know Him and be united with Him.
- ❖ The words “in Our Likeness” imply the goal man should aim at within the scope of virtue and holiness, and which he could attain in varying degrees.
- ❖ Sin does not strip man of God’s image (features that characterize nature). However, it strips him of the “likeness” since virtue and holiness are related to man’s free choice.
- ❖ The words “let us create man” do not refer to the spirit alone or to the body alone. They refer to both since man is one entity. Moreover, the fact that man has a body does not make him less than angels. For man has a more perfect nature and has been granted greater potentials

since he is a small world. Actually, he is the meeting point of all spiritual and physical (material) creation. As such, man is priest to creation in its totality.

- ❖ “In the image of God” man has been created so that he is enabled to see God Who lives within his heart. Through faith and referring to his own soul for “the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21).
- ❖ St. Anthony said. “He who knows himself knows God.” St. Isaac the Syrian said. “If you have a pure heart then heaven is within you.” It has been said of St. Pachomius that, “due to the purity of his heart he saw God, who is invisible, as though through a looking-glass.”
- ❖ Since man is made in the image of God then every member of the human race, however sinful or poorly talented, is very precious and dear in God’s sight. St. Clement of Alexandria says “When you see your brother, you see the picture of God. Such an honor is underlined in Orthodox worship, honor to all mankind.”
- ❖ Moreover, since man is made in the image of God, then his soul is immortal, for God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” This breath is the mystery behind man’s power.
- ❖ We notice that when Jesus rose from the dead, “He breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:22).
- ❖ Immortality applies to the soul where “the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastics 12:7).
- ❖ However, the nature of the body made of dust is not evil, for Adam was good while he was made of that body, and before his fall. For God does not create evil and there is a difference between natural instincts that are pure and holy and the deviations that have occurred to these after the onset of sin.

II. He Made Them Male And Female

- ❖ Refer to the following texts: Genesis 2:21-25; Matthew 19:4-6; Ephesians 5:28-32.
- ❖ We note how St. Paul uses the same expressions for Adam and Eve who is a bone taken out of his bones and flesh taken out of his flesh. St. Paul uses this to underline the relationship between Jesus Christ and us by saying, “For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones” (Ephesians 5:30).
- ❖ The natural relationship that tied Adam and Eve, being of one body, became ours once more through Jesus and the mystery of the Holy Spirit which made the two become one, man and wife. This new, unified body has become the seed of the Church, which consists of members joined together with Christ’s body.
- ❖ This indicates that there is no distinction whatsoever between the sexes from the point of view of their rights and duties, whether these be spiritual or social. St. Paul underlines this point as he says, “There is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

III. Why Did God Give Adam The Commandment?

- ❖ The human soul arises out of God Himself. Consequently, it possesses wisdom, freedom, and will, even though these are limited because the physical body binds them. That is why the human soul is aware of herself.

- ❖ Moreover, this is evident in the use of its talents granted to it by God. On this account, it was necessary that God give Adam a commandment that would offer him the opportunity to use his freedom, his will, and his wisdom besides self-realization. Thus, the commandment was given to Adam to underline his freedom rather than to bind it to achieve self-realization or to cancel or thwart it. Moreover, the commandment is a tie of love between God and Adam. Adam obeys God's words as a sign of sincere love and trusts in Him and therefore deserves a good reward.

IV. How Did Man Fall?

- ❖ Adam's nature was not inclined to evil. His fall proceeded from his own free will, which he projected into a prohibited larger scope. By obeying the evil one Adam fell and committed evil, which he did not know. What he did know, however, was that the result of evil is death.

V. The State Of Man After His Fall

- ❖ He started to fear God, who loved him, and the voice of indictment and punishment filled his being "You should surely die."
- ❖ His will to do well weakened as the Spirit of God left him, while the knowledge of good and evil introduced in him an enormous duality and inner conflict. It became impossible for man, however hard he resisted, to progress even one step towards eternity alone. This is due to the soul that is impotent in the lack of directing its conscience towards matters above its potentials, all on its own.
- ❖ The crack in man's being:
 - a) Within himself: a conflict between the spirit and the body and between the conscience and the self.
 - b) Between himself and others: egoism (of Adam), hatred and envy (of Cain).
 - c) Between him and the creation: upon losing God's image within him, he lost his power over the earth and nature, which began to revolt against him.

VI. Man's Salvation

- ❖ Man's salvation takes place through incarnation (and hence the shedding of blood). In this act, God united Himself with man so that His life might flow into man and consequently be granted to him. In other words, man renews God's image in him and shares God's love, glory and holiness. This does not mean that man achieves the essence of God, but it makes him, as St. Peter says, "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4).
- ❖ Having experienced the features of God's love to us, we understand the quality of love we should show our neighbors on the level of the family, the Church, the country, and the whole world. This is what Jesus requested, "that you love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:12).

VII. Christian Love Embodies The Following Characteristics

- ❖ It is founded upon self-sacrifice, "By this we know love of God, because He laid down His life for us and we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16).
- ❖ It is embellished by sharing, "who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation?" (2 Corinthians 11:29)

- ❖ On the plane of the will and of work, “my little children, let us not love in word, or in tongue; but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).
- ❖ Gratuitous, unconditional love, “for when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6-8).
- ❖ Love that is specifically directed towards those in suffering, deep need, and the oppressed.

VIII. Man Has A Divine Task

Through that he achieves the full stature of his humanity.

- ❖ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10).
- ❖ For the Christian, after having received the gift of faith in Christ, is invited to use all his potentials in love - in doing good works as he follows Christ’s leadership in all things.
 - a) In thought: we have been granted His thoughts.
 - b) In words: From the good treasure of his heart his mouth speaks.
 - c) At work: where a new divine concept operates after the renewal of our nature, so that work is not merely a social obligation.
 - d) In worship:
 - On the internal level: where our humanity rises to an angelic degree.
 - On the external level: catering for the needs and visiting the widows, the orphans, the sick, the sad, and the imprisoned.

Applications:

- ❖ Study the songs of praise and practice them.
- ❖ Undertake a research about “Knowledge and Faith.”
- ❖ Practice works of sacrificial love (that is self giving, e.g. catering to the needs of and visiting orphanages, sick brothers and sisters, prisoners, and those who suffer).

Week 4 - Cults: Jehovah's witnesses

Objective:

- ❖ To understand the beliefs of Jehovah's witnesses.
- ❖ To understand that our Orthodox faith considers the beliefs of the cults as heresies.

Memory Verse:

"I and My Father are one" (John 10:30).

References:

- ❖ Cults at my door: An Orthodox Examination of the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses - Fr. John W. Morris.
- ❖ Pope Shenouda III sermons and El Keraza magazine

Introduction:

If you take the time to talk to Jehovah's witnesses or Mormons in some depth, you may discover (if they explain their faith candidly) that although they claim to bring new truths about Jesus Christ, their beliefs are really more similar to an ancient heresy than to the Gospel taught by Christ and His Apostles.

From her very beginning, the Church has struggled to defend the truth taught by Jesus Christ to His Apostles against false teaching.

Two movements, Gnosticism and Arianism arose during the first centuries of Christian history. Gnosticism, one of the first movements to threaten Orthodox Christianity, taught that Christ had left secret knowledge to be revealed only to the elect. Some Gnostics also believed that humans existed as disembodied souls before their birth on earth.

For almost three centuries, the Church led by such great theologians as Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, fought to prevent the wave of Gnosticism from washing away the Gospel taught by Jesus Christ. However, once Gnosticism had been cast onto the dustbin of history, another teacher arose to challenge Orthodox Christianity. Arius, a priest in Alexandria, gathered a large following for his teaching that Jesus Christ is not God Incarnate, but a creation of God. Arius also rejected the Orthodox doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

After a major struggle that shook the whole Christian world, the Church rejected the new teaching and reaffirmed its commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the conflict with Arianism gave the Church its basic statement of Faith; the Creed adopted by the first two Ecumenical Councils, Nicene in 325 and Constantinople in 381, which is recited at every Orthodox Divine Liturgy. The struggle with Arianism also gave the Orthodox Church some of its greatest theologians, Saint Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers, Saints Basil the Great, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzen

Although Orthodoxy eventually triumphed over these and other heresies, men and women have continued to reject the teachings of the Church and to follow their own doctrines. America has produced two major challenges to Orthodox Christianity: the Jehovah's Witnesses, whose teachings

resemble ancient Arianism in many ways; and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, whose beliefs and practices are very similar to, although not identical with, ancient Gnosticism.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Jehovah's Witnesses

Charles Taze Russell, the founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses, was born on February 16, 1852. He grew up in Allegheny and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and became a journalist. In 1875, Russell, who had left the Congregational Church, became the leader of a Bible class in Pittsburgh. Four years later, Russell began publication of *Zion's Watch Tower*, which quickly grew to a circulation of over 60,000.

By 1908, Russell had moved to Brooklyn, still the headquarters of the movement today. Despite his rather unorthodox views, he gained an enthusiastic following. Some flocked to study at his Bible School. Others worked on three Kingdom Farms that produced food, furniture, and other needs for the society and for Russell's publishing house in Brooklyn, in return for room and board and an allowance.

Despite his success as a religious leader, evidence presented in courts when his wife divorced him and in unsuccessful suits he brought against his critics reveals that Russell was nothing more than a clever con man. Official court records show that among other things, Russell controlled a holding company that channeled the money of the organization into his personal accounts.

The leader of the Jehovah's Witnesses had also been involved in such schemes as selling his followers an inferior grade of wheat he called "Miracle Wheat" at highly inflated prices. Russell had thrilled his followers with published accounts of speeches before enthusiastic groups that never really took place. During one embarrassing testimony, an attorney forced Russell to admit under oath that he had lied when he claimed that he could read Greek, that he had been ordained to the ministry, and that his wife had not divorced him. Thus, court records reveal that Russell was anything but a righteous man who sacrificed his personal wealth and comfort for his religious ideals.

A. Arianism reincarnated

Following Russell's sudden death on October 31, 1916, Joseph Franklin Rutherford assumed leadership of the organization until his death in 1942. Because Rutherford had been a special judge of the Eighth Judicial Circuit Court in Booneville, Missouri, his followers called him Judge Rutherford. Rutherford gave the growing movement the name Jehovah's Witnesses, from the incorrect translation of *Yahweh* or "The Lord God" in the King James Bible.

During many radio addresses, Rutherford expanded on Russell's ideas to create the beliefs of the Jehovah's Witnesses, while denouncing traditional Christian doctrine as "satanic." Today there are 3.8 million followers of the Jehovah's Witness cult. They publish their magazine, *The Watch Tower*, in a hundred languages and are known for going door-to-door trying to persuade others to join their movement.

B. Jehovah's Witnesses beliefs

- ❖ Like the ancient Arians, Jehovah's Witnesses deny the doctrine of the Incarnation and the deity of Christ. They believe that God created Jesus Christ before the beginning of the world in the form of the Archangel Michael, who eventually came to earth as Jesus Christ - a created being who, despite his moral perfection, was only a man, not the Only Begotten Son of God.

- ❖ They also believe that the Holy Spirit is merely Jehovah's invisible energizing force. Even today, followers of the Jehovah's Witnesses wage a relentless war against the doctrines of the Incarnation and the Holy Trinity through such forums as Internet news groups. Rutherford's successors released their own version of the Bible, The New World Translation of the Scriptures, in 1961.
- ❖ The New World Translation makes subtle changes in the text of the Bible to support Jehovah's Witness doctrine. For example, it adds "a" to John 1:1 so that the text reads, "the Word was a god." However, the correct translation of this important verse is, "The Word was God." As correctly translated, the first chapter of Saint John's Gospel shows that the same Arian teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses cannot be reconciled with the Holy Scriptures.
- ❖ Although they deny the divinity of Christ, the Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Christ atoned for sin by His death. Significantly, they believe that Our Lord died on a stake rather than on a cross.
- ❖ They also believe that only 144,000 will be saved (Revelation 7:1-8). All others will either cease to exist or will rise with a physical body to everlasting life on earth. Jehovah's Witnesses also believe that Christ came again in 1914 and cast the devil and his angels down to earth, where they caused a great deal of trouble. Indeed, 1914 is a good date to cite for trouble, for the First World War began in that year
- ❖ Jehovah's Witnesses believe that four years later, Christ entered the spiritual temple to cleanse it in preparation for the resurrection of the 144,000 chosen to join him there. At the time of that resurrection, they believe, Christ and his armies will defeat Satan and his followers (including organized religion) at the great battle of Armageddon. Following his victory, Christ will then cast Satan and his followers into the abyss or a deathlike state for a thousand years, during which Christ and the 144,000 saved ones will rule over earth from heaven.
- ❖ During this time there will be two resurrections. First the righteous of the Old Testament will rise and become princes on earth. Then all those who wanted to do right but died without the opportunity to hear the truth of Jehovah will rise and receive a chance to become faithful members of the Jehovah's Witnesses. Finally, Satan will be released from bondage and begin a campaign of deceit to lead a final rebellion against Jehovah. After Jehovah intervenes and casts Satan and his followers into annihilation in the lake of fire, Christ and the 144,000 will remain in heaven, while those who accepted the truth of the Jehovah's Witness religion will live in an earthly paradise.
- ❖ They believe that God does not talk to women because Eve was the reason of the fall of man.
- ❖ There is no difference between the death of the unrighteous and animal. They both will end with death with no eternal soul (Ecclesiastics 3:18).
- ❖ They do not believe in the intercessions of saints or the sacraments.
- ❖ They believe that St. Mary has other children.
- ❖ They do not believe that baptism clean us from sin (Titus 3:5, Colossians 2:12, Acts 2:28).
- ❖ They do not pray in temples or churches

C. Comments

- ❖ Although the Scriptures teach and the Orthodox Church affirms the Second Coming of Christ, there is nothing in the Bible that mentions the coming of Christ in 1914. Indeed, Our Lord

said in Mark 13:32 that no one, not even the angels in heaven, knows when He will come again. There is no mention in the Scriptures of Christ coming into a “spiritual temple.” Scriptures teach not that Christ will return in secret, but that He will return with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

- ❖ The New Testament does not teach two forms of salvation, one for 144,000 (a number used in Revelation 7:1-8 to symbolize the Church as the New Israel), and another, lesser salvation for everyone else. Finally, it is evident that Russell was a less than honest man, who used religion as a means of personal enrichment. We believe that the soul is eternal (1 Thessalonians 5:3, Ecclesiastics 12:5).

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF DECEMBER

Week 1- Cults: Mormons

Week 2- The Christian and the Life of Chastity

Week 3- How to Start a Spiritual Life with God

Week 4- Song of Songs

Week 1 - Cults: Mormons

Objective:

- ❖ To understand the beliefs of the Mormons.
- ❖ To understand that our Orthodox faith considers the beliefs of the cults as heresies.

Memory Verse:

“Blessed is he who keeps the words of prophecy of this book” (Revelation 22:7).

References:

- ❖ Cults at my door: An Orthodox Examination of the Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses - Fr. John W. Morris.
- ❖ Pope Shenouda III sermons and El Keraza magazine

Lesson Outline:

I. The Mormons

A. Introduction

Mormonism grew during a period of great change and social turmoil in America, the early nineteenth century. This atmosphere of religious turmoil permitted Joseph Smith, Jr., an obscure man with little formal education, to gain a following for his claim to be a prophet of God with a mission to restore true Christianity.

B. Joseph Smith - Prophet or Profiteer?

Born in Sharon, Vermont, on December 23, 1805, Joseph Smith, Jr., moved in 1816 with his father and mother, Joseph Sr. and Lucy Smith, and his eight brothers and sisters to Palmyra, New York, in the heart of this area of religious ferment. There the elder Smith eked out a living as a farmer and peddler while spending his spare time looking for buried treasure or counterfeiting his own money. As he grew to adulthood, Joseph Jr. followed his father’s example, claiming to locate buried riches with the help of a peepstone.

Stimulated perhaps by the religious excitement of his new home, Smith began to claim special visions, and shifted his concerns from the search for buried treasure to the proclamation of his new religion. In 1820, he claimed to have received a visitation by God the Father and Jesus Christ instructing him to avoid the rival religions fighting for men’s souls in the area (such as Methodism and Presbyterianism), for they had forsaken the true Gospel. Three years later, an angel named Moroni supposedly appeared to lead him to the location of a set of buried golden plates containing the writings of the ancient inhabitants of North America. Aided by a set of large spectacles, the Urim and Thummim, which allowed him to read the “Reformed Egyptian” of the plates, Smith translated and published their contents as *The Book of Mormon* in 1830.

C. The Book of Mormons

Smith’s followers consider *The Book of Mormon*, a collection of fifteen books that tell the story of two ancient peoples that immigrated to America from the Middle East long before the birth of

Christ, a part of Holy Scripture. The first people, the Jaredites crossed the Atlantic in eight barges and settled in Central America over two thousand years before Christ.

In the New World, they established a great civilization. However, a terrible civil war resulted in the complete destruction of this ancient people. According to the Mormons, the prophet Ether left the record of their history on twenty-four plates, which form the Book of Ether in the Mormon Bible.

The second people, the followers of the prophet Lehi, fled Jerusalem in 600 B.C. and settled on the West Coast of South America. However, Laman, one of the sons of the prophet, rebelled against God and became an outcast along with his family. The sons of Laman, whom God punished for their sins by turning their skin dark, are the ancestors of the American Indians. Lehi's other son, Nephi, followed the path of righteousness and led his people to establish a great civilization in Central and North America.

Indeed, the descendants of Nephi were so holy that Jesus Christ Himself descended from heaven in AD. 34 to preach to them and to establish the church in the New World. However, the wicked descendants of Laman grew stronger and destroyed the descendants of Nephi in a terrible battle in AD. 385. Moroni, the only survivor of this holocaust, recorded their history and buried it with the plates of Ether in Hill Cumorah, where Joseph Smith claimed to have found them in 1823-24.

No credible archeologist or anthropologist has found the slightest evidence to support the fantastic story of The Book of Mormon. Indeed, all authorities agree that the Native Americans are descended from Asiatic peoples who moved into the New World from Siberia through Alaska. The canonical Scriptures give no indication that ancient Jews migrated to the New World, or that Jesus Christ ever visited America. There is no record of the existence of such a language as "Reformed Egyptian," much less of its use in America.

Suspiciously large portions of The Book of Mormon appear to be crudely reworded selections from the King James Bible. Indeed, there is very strong evidence that the real source of The Book of Mormon is the imagination of Joseph Smith, rather than a mysterious set of gold tablets. Significantly, the Mormons cannot produce the golden plates as evidence of the truth of Smith's claims, for they no longer exist. There is even considerable reason to believe that Smith actually rewrote an unpublished novel by Solomon Spaulding entitled The Manuscript Found, using it as the basis for The Book of Mormon.

Spaulding, a retired Presbyterian minister, submitted his work to a publisher in Pittsburgh shortly before his death in 1316. Sidney Rigdon, an early associate of Smith, visited the printing house that year and showed a copy of Spaulding's manuscript to several friends. Although the original work has disappeared, several of Spaulding's relatives and friends have testified to the great similarity between The Manuscript Found and The Book of Mormon.

Regardless of whether The Book of Mormon came solely from Smith's vivid imagination or from Spaulding's work of fiction, the Mormon prophet utilized his claim of access to the mysterious golden tablets for personal gain. As a result, he became the leader of a growing religious movement that was much more successful than his fruitless efforts to discover buried treasure. So great was Smith's desire for financial profit from his works that he persuaded one gullible follower, Matthew Harris, to mortgage his farm to finance the publication of the original edition of The Book of Mormon on March 26, 1830.

Smith also claimed that God spoke directly to him. Along with The Book of Mormon, Smith's prophecies and sermons, published in Doctrine and Covenants, The Pearl of Great Price, and The Teachings of Joseph Smith, form the basis for Mormon doctrine. On May 15, 1829, Smith and Oliver

Cowdery claimed Saint John the Baptist conferred on them the Aaronic Priesthood. A few days later, they asserted that Saints Peter, James, and John came down from heaven to admit them to the higher Melchizedek Priesthood.

D. Spread of Mormonism

Smith gathered five followers and organized the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints on April 6, 1830, in Fayette, New York. Stimulated by the publication of *The Book of Mormon*, the small group grew swiftly and moved to Kirkland, Ohio, where they formed themselves into a commune.

From Kirkland, the infant Mormon Church spread to other cities, including independence, Missouri. Here, Smith ordered the faithful to purchase land on the basis of a vision that Christ would establish his temple there following the Second Coming. Naturally, Smith, who did not hesitate to condemn all other churches as “apostate,” aroused a great deal of opposition.

Finally, Smith and his followers organized a town of their own in Nauvoo, Illinois. However, criticism of the new religion continued to grow, especially following Smith’s “revelation” of July 12, 1843, sanctioning polygamy. In an effort to crush opposition, Smith and his followers destroyed the plant of a newspaper that had published several critical articles. As a result, the “prophet” found himself in jail. However, the bars failed to protect him from the enraged populace, which attacked the prison and killed Smith on June 27, 1844.

E. Go West, Young Man

Following the “martyrdom” of their leader, the Mormons fell into a struggle between the various claimants to the leadership of the movement. After an unsuccessful attempt by Sidney Rigdon to claim the mantle of the prophet, Brigham Young emerged as the leader of the largest faction of Mormons. Young believed that Mormons could never practice their faith unmolested while surrounded by followers of other religions. Therefore, he led thousands in a grueling trek across the wilderness to Salt Lake City, Utah. Those who rejected Young’s leadership, especially following the introduction of polygamy, formed two smaller groups: the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Church of Christ (Temple Lot) in Independence. Young, who eventually had twenty-five wives, was a brilliant leader. He presided over the transformation of a desert wasteland into a well-planned city, and left an organization of 140,000 at his death in 1877.

Today, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints claims a membership of over two million throughout the world. Still centered in Salt Lake City, the Mormon Church consists of over six thousand parishes, called wards, which are organized into “stakes.” Advised by a council of twelve “apostles,” the president of the church exercises absolute authority and is considered a spokesman for God by the faithful.

In addition to its religious activities, the Mormon Church sponsors a very effective social services program for its members. “Storehouses,” a remnant of the movement’s origins in the age of communes, provide food and clothing for members in need. The body sends out thousands of missionaries, young men who give a year or two to spread their faith. Known for their white shirts, black ties, and bicycles, they go door to door in an effort to bring others into the Mormon fold.

F. The Mormon God

Based largely on the revelations by Joseph Smith, Mormon doctrine is radically different from traditional Christian doctrine. Like the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Mormons reject the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Ridiculing traditional monotheism, Smith believed that the god of this world is nothing but one of the many gods who populate the heavens.

Smith taught that the god of this world, the Elohim of the Old Testament, is really an exalted man who lived on a planet and had a father like any other man. Elohim is not a spirit, but possesses a human body of flesh and bones. Indeed, materialism is so important to Mormons that they affirm the eternity of matter and deny its creation by Elohim or any other god. The Father of this world, identified as Adam by some Mormon theologians, achieved godhood and sired a race of spiritual children. The Father has not reached perfection, but is in a state of constant growth.

Although Mormonism rejects the traditional doctrine of the Trinity, the followers of this religion believe in the existence of the Son and the Holy Spirit. However, they insist that these are separate from the Father, not “one in essence and undivided” as Orthodoxy teaches. Mormons believe that Christ is not the Only Begotten Son of God, but merely the firstborn of the Father and the elder brother of the human race. Identifying Christ as the Jehovah of the Old Testament, the Mormons believe that He organized creation at the command of His Father, Elohim.

Following the fall of man, Christ came to earth to offer Himself as a sacrifice on the cross to save fallen mankind from eternal death. The Holy Spirit of Mormonism is a separate entity, which acts as the agent of Elohim in managing creation. Mormons believe that all humans are actually sons of god, and that their existence began long before physical birth.

According to their doctrine, Elohim gave birth to many spiritual children, some of whom became men and some of whom continue to serve as angels until their physical birth. Before the organization of this world, Elohim met with his spiritual children to plan a place for their dwelling, that they might grow into godhood as he had done. As a result, the earth came into being.

However, Lucifer and a third of the sons of god rejected Elohim’s plan and were cast out of heaven. Unable to assume physical bodies, necessary for their exaltation to godhood, they became disembodied spirits. Those who obeyed Elohim were allowed to come to earth to assume bodies so that they might grow into godhood. Adam was the first spirit to receive a body and became the father of mankind. However, his wife Eve fell through the temptation of Satan, thereby presenting Adam with a dilemma.

His mission was to have children by Eve to provide bodies for the spiritual children of Elohim. However, through her fall by eating of the forbidden fruit, Eve became mortal and her children would be mortal. Adam, according to Smith, unselfishly chose to become mortal himself by sin so that he might fulfill the Father’s command to have children. Therefore, according to Mormon theology, every person born into this world consists of two parts. The first is the spirit, which was born of Elohim before the organization of this world. The second is the corrupt body inherited from Adam and Eve.

Because of the greatness of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, Mormons believe that all mankind will have the opportunity to gain salvation. Following death, every person will await the Last Judgment in an intermediate place called Paradise. There the dead will have a chance to repent of their sins and become Latter Day Saints. The Mormons practice the baptism of the dead by proxy as a means to assist those in Paradise to become members of their church.

G. The degrees of Glory

Following the Last judgment, only those who knowingly rejected Christ will spend eternity in perdition with Satan and his angels. The rest of mankind will inherit one of the three degrees of “Glory.” Those who did not become Christians and who lived evil lives will spend eternity in the “Telestial Kingdom.”

There, separated from Christ, they will receive the just rewards for their sins. Those who lived

righteous lives and who became Christians following death will inherit the “Terrestrial Kingdom.” Spending eternity in the presence of Christ, they will, however, be deprived of fellowship with Elohim and full exaltation to godhood.

Finally, the righteous Christians will be raised to the “Celestial Kingdom.” There, in the presence of Elohim, they will share in his glory and will become gods themselves. Those in the Celestial Kingdom will even be able to have spirit children and to become gods of their own worlds, just as Elohim became the god of this world.

In order for a person to enter into the highest level of the Celestial Kingdom, he must fulfill certain obligations. He must be baptized by immersion in the name of “the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,” and must receive the Holy Spirit by the laying on of hands from an elder in the Mormon Church. Every person aspiring to godhood must also enter into a “celestial marriage” for eternity in a special ceremony in a Mormon Temple.

As gods, men and women in the Celestial Kingdom will be able to give birth to their own spiritual children and organize their own worlds for them— just as Elohim became the god of this world, which he populated with his own spiritual sons and daughters.

H. The Priesthood and the Temple

Mormonism places great emphasis on its priesthood, claiming to be a restoration of the true Church by virtue of its exclusive possession of the Melchizedek Priesthood. Before a person may advance to the higher priesthood, he must first pass through the three ranks of the lower Aaronic Priesthood. Named after the first Jewish High Priest, Aaron, the lesser priesthood of Mormonism consists of deacons, teachers, and priests.

Following advancement through the Aaronic Priesthood, a man is eligible to enter the Melchizedek Priesthood. Named for Melchizedek of Genesis, the higher priesthood of Mormonism consists of five levels: elders, seventies, high priests, patriarchs, and apostles. In each area one high priest has the office of bishop of the ward, a group of stakes. One high priest serves as the chief executive officer of the Mormon Church, the First President, who is believed to possess special prophetic powers and to act as a spokesman for God. Twelve apostles form a council to advise the First President.

The temples are central to the exercise of the Mormon priesthood. Here, in absolute secrecy, the faithful participate in elaborate ceremonies, complete with secret handshakes and special clothing, to receive the Endowments of the Priesthood and to be married for eternity. They also participate in baptism, ordination, and even marriage services for the departed. Mormons wish to extend the blessings of their faith to their ancestors and spend a great deal of time and effort in extensive genealogical research to learn the names of their ancestors. Then they are united in celestial marriage and prepared for exaltation to godhood in the world to come.

The Mormons have built sixteen temples, twelve in the United States and others in Canada, England, Switzerland, and New Zealand. The most famous temple is in Salt Lake City, the headquarters of the Mormon Church. Only members of the church in good standing may enter a temple, and no part of the ceremony may be disclosed to an outsider. Thus, like the ancient Gnostics, the Mormons teach that only those who are admitted to secret knowledge can achieve the highest level of salvation.

Actually, the rites of Mormon temples bear no resemblance to the worship of the temple of ancient Jerusalem or to the worship of any Christian Church. There is no praise of God or reading from Holy Scripture, or any other act usually associated with worship. Indeed, the services are more

like the initiation rites of a fraternal organization than services of worship.

H. Recycled Gnosticism

Although there are important differences between ancient Gnosticism and Mormonism, the similarities are striking. They both replace biblical Christianity with a very elaborate set of legends and esoteric teachings found, for Mormons, in the fanciful tales of *The Book of Mormon* and the teachings of Joseph Smith.

Like some ancient Gnostics, Mormons believe in the preexistence of souls, a doctrine contrary to Scripture and condemned by the Church at the Fifth Ecumenical Council, Constantinople II in 553. The secrecy of the temple rites of Mormonism is a parallel to the secret knowledge of ancient Gnosticism.

However, Mormonism differs from ancient Gnosticism in one major way. Gnosticism considered the physical world so evil that many Gnostics denied the Incarnation, teaching instead that Christ only seemed to have a physical body (a doctrine called Docetism). The Latter Day Saints, on the other hand, exalt matter over spirit, believing that matter is eternal.

Although the Scriptures teach that God is spirit (John 4:24), the Latter Day Saints believe that god has a body of flesh and bones. Indeed, they believe that the god of this world is an exalted man who became a god. Finally, they believe that by following the beliefs and practices of the Mormon religion, they too may become gods ruling over their own worlds.

Conclusion:

We have to know and understand our faith first and strengthen our spirit before we engage in any interaction with a member of the cults. It is important that we arm ourselves with the verses that answer their misconceptions of the Bible and Jesus Christ.

Applications:

- ❖ Search for verses that support the divinity of Christ and the Trinity.
- ❖ Search for verses to support the importance of each of the church sacraments.

Week 2 - The Christian and the Life of Chastity

Objective:

- ❖ Clarification of the Christian understanding of the life of chastity.
- ❖ Chastity is the fruit of inward control and interaction of God with man.

Memory Verse:

“But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you” (Romans 8:9).

References:

- ❖ 2 Thessalonians 1:12
- ❖ 1 Corinthians 6:12-20; 7:1-9
- ❖ Galatians 5:16-26

Lesson Outline:

Sex in man is related to instincts, yet it transcends them:

- ❖ Ordinary instincts pose for a thing or object that upon its consumption is relieved of its tension. It is like hunger that disappears by consuming food, similarly thirst. As for sex in man, it is essentially a drive to unity, and unity cannot be achieved between a person and a thing or object. However, it could be between one person and another. This unity between two patrons has the ultimate goal of perfecting each other. It is a meeting of greater depth and goals than merely a passing pleasure.
- ❖ If the object of sex were pleasure, then the other person would be of no importance other than a tool or means of achieving pleasure. He/she is no longer a person to unite with, but a thing or object to consume.
- ❖ If we isolate sex from its human implication to overcome the problem of loneliness in man, and be satisfied with trivial pleasure as a goal, then the result will be a greater feeling of loneliness and inward emptiness. These lead to frustration, disappointment and boredom.
- ❖ The western world has solved the problem of sex in a negative way, through immorality. The result was greater experience of boredom and frustration. This is due to the fact that man is a divine creature that is unsatisfied by trivial pleasure. Moreover, such triviality opposes man's nature and draws man from one form of slavery into a stronger one. This explains why the majority of western youth use drugs to overcome the problem of their overwhelming sense of loss.
- ❖ On the other hand, Christianity does not call for harmful repression rather; it calls for inner control that can be achieved by the support of grace that strengthens man's will. The soul, then, truly overcomes its egoism and isolation and hence is enabled to participate in the communion with God and fellowmen.

- ❖ It is essential that sex prevail in achieving its unifying and human objective. In doing so it outsets narcissism which could make it a prey to suppression, suffocation, or loss in lustful pleasures. For an effective realization of its objectives, one of two alternatives may be practiced:
- ❖ Determining to control your instincts and direct its energies towards seeking a counterpart and having marital perspectives.
- ❖ Greater transcendence of sex and redirecting the wealth of emotions to God to His service and the service of others.
- ❖ Although these alternatives are different, yet their ultimate goal is the same since in both cases there is the search to meet another one (a counterpart). Such a meeting cannot be wholly satisfactory without God who is the core of unity among people and the pole to mankind's longing.

I. What Is The Meaning Of Christian Chastity?

- ❖ Chastity does not simply mean refraining from practicing delinquent lusts while the mind and heart remain impure. Rather, it involves the work of grace, for chastity is a positive virtue and not a negative one.
- ❖ Repression portrays wrongly the blessed sexual instincts as an enemy, so that we turn all our energies to fight them. In doing that, we lose the blessed function of our sexual potential, which is a source of generosity, love and sacrifice. We also waste our original energies and efforts. This leads to tension, psychological disturbances, immorality, evil egocentricity, and the inclination to dominate.
- ❖ Christian chastity is the positive channeling of sexual energy, thus drawing from its wealth to strengthen the personality and enliven the different human activities. Moreover, ultimate chastity crosses the boundaries of external conduct and is achieved through the purity of the whole being and holiness of thought.
- ❖ True chastity is not easy to achieve, yet a good Christian carries his Cross daily feeling happy and free. His heart, which is inclined towards eternity, urges him to do without physical pleasure willingly and joyfully. In that sense, chastity is a form of martyrdom, and according to St. Athanasius, "deaden your members on earth and become a martyr by your own will".
- ❖ Christian chastity associates sex in marriage with love, self-giving, and sacrifice. Consequently, it is desirable before and after marriage. For a chaste person constantly struggles to tear himself away from the call of selfish and trivial pleasure. He does so because he has chosen to be wholly dedicated, psychologically and physically, either to the mystery of holy wedlock or to press forward arid persevere for the sake of a better love and complete consecration to God.
- ❖ Christian chastity is all-inclusive for it includes instincts, inclinations, potentials, senses, clothing and food. It is also a maturing process, which deepens according to one's sincerity to God and the obedience of His commandments.

II. Chastity and physical health

- ❖ The center of instincts in the brain is greatly independent in animals. In man, however, it is subject to a higher center and that is a layer, which is subject to the frontal lobe of the brain behind the forehead. This area is the center dominating the self and reactionary balance. It

also governs man's ability to control himself and channel his instincts without surrendering to their power. This is where the restraint of the senses is essential, especially that of sight as our Lord pointed out.

- ❖ The nervous system is greatly affected by habit. On that account desire spontaneously instigates lust even though external provocation is absent. Perseverance, patience and conscious, restraint (without suppression) is important here in order to form correct habits protecting the youth from constant provocation.
- ❖ It is also necessary to avoid wrong trends in religious education, which teach that the body is the source of sin, therefore hateful. Here the difference between the body and lust of the body needs to be clarified.

III. Chastity aid psychological health

- ❖ The satisfaction of a child's needs (security, love, freedom, control) fills him with confidence in life and people. Therefore, he is enabled to step out of his own entity in order to communicate with others. Upon growing up into a young youth, he is urged, through love for others as well as a deep sense of conviction and obligation, to reach out to them.
- ❖ Children should not be made to fear sexual matters. On the contrary, their questions should be answered intelligently and broad mindedly. In this way, they will grow up learning to accept them and feel confident that God has not created anything harmful within them, which could cause tension, conflict, or sadness.
- ❖ The importance of a spiritual life founded upon correct faith and filled with the spirit of thanksgiving and joy is most essential. A happy family life is also essential along with the satisfaction arising from leading an ecclesiastical life (Church life).

IV. Chastity and the spiritual life

- ❖ Spiritual life consists of positive persevering work, in which a person outsets his own self and rises above it in a state of sublimation. He will receive blessings only after perseverance and struggling.
- ❖ A true Christian crucifies the body with the various whims and lusts (Galatians 5:24) by the action of the Holy Spirit within him. A spiritual life is a life deeply associated with Christ (I live, yet not I, but Christ lives in me). It also involves the actual practice of prayer, confession, communion, and constantly reading the Word of God to appease our hunger. Such practices are the means of obtaining grace.
- ❖ Such grace, which we obtain through our positive struggle, blesses our spiritual life that flows purely and sincerely out of the heart. It also ensures steadfastness and growth in our love, generosity and chastity.

Applications:

- ❖ Develop the spirit of deep reciprocal love and concern among youth.
- ❖ Develop the spirit of cooperation by carrying out tasks together.
- ❖ Develop the spirit of repentance daily and conscientiously, careful scrutiny during confession, and constantly practicing the mystery of the Holy Communion.

Questions:

- ❖ Christian chastity is a virtue, which has further implications than the world's view of it. Elaborate and clarify the importance of this virtue.
- ❖ Discuss the following expressions:
 - a. Christian virtue is progressive.
 - b. Christian virtue does not produce or cause suppression or subjugation of the instincts.
 - c. Chastity is an important issue for youth.
- ❖ Mention the relationship between Christian chastity and each of the following:
 - a. Psychological health
 - b. Physical health
- ❖ "Chastity is closely related to man's spiritual life." Explain.
- ❖ What are the internal and external factors that oppose chastity? How can these be overcome?

Week 3 - How to Start a Spiritual Life with God

Objective:

- ❖ To study the signs marking correct start.
- ❖ To indicate false starts in the way of spirituality.

Memory verse:

“When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom” (Proverbs 11:2).

Lesson Outline:

I. God Is The One Who Always Takes The Initiative With Man

Jesus Christ incarnated and came to us bringing atonement by accepting to die for us and consequently lifting the load of indictment on our behalf. He granted us a life of victory forever and the hope for an eternal, glorious, and heavenly heritage by His sacrifice. He said about Himself, “I stand at the door and knock” for He invites us to live with Him forever as He says, “In My Father’s house there are many rooms.” By all this, He seeks to make us members of His flock, with His saints, and the family of God’s house.

II. Why Don’t We Live With God Right Now?

Our response to God’s invitation means that we dismiss and despise Satan and the will of the self. At the same time, we choose the narrow road, which is the way enlightened by God’s commandments and the voice of the Holy Spirit.

If we neglect the commandments of our Heavenly Father and turn to a distant world where we are lost as we follow our own lustful instincts, then we discover our intense hunger and thirst. Our life is devoid of God’s consolation. At this point, we need to arise and return into the bosom of our Father. We can do so by kneeling down and praying fervently, filled with the hope and the faith that He will receive us joyfully and open His house for us. He will do so because His son was dead but is now alive, he was lost but now is found. Consequently, we should deliver our lives into His hands, leaving behind our carnal desires and worldly inclinations. Surely God will perceive our repentance and sincerity and will accept our return to Him.

Someone may say that he was determined to repent but did not act upon that, or that he wished to live with Christ but did not know how to go through this experience. Another may say that he started but failed and sinned quickly. In such conditions it is necessary to realize that the start was wrong for the reasons studies below.

III. Obstacles Preventing Us From Making A Correct Start

A. Things that are dear to us

In other words, we have not given up any personal or physical pleasures in spite of our desire to live with God. Any form of sin is darkness and death as well as destruction to the soul. Consequently, not giving it up indicates that we do not fully trust in God’s power to liberate us and fill us. If we trust our Lord, He will give us victory, safety, and recovery from the bites of the serpent (Satan) more than those who were healed by looking with faith at the serpent made of brass.

B. Peer pressure

Peer pressure from wrong friends and the fear of losing them if we walk in the spiritual path is a major obstacle. Now I ask you, “Who is the one who is more permanent, eternal and beneficial to you? Is it the evil friend, or God who is the best supporter, helper, and consoler and who can compensate by giving you saintly friends in this life, friends who will love you in the deep sense of the word and will treat you with appreciation and respect.

Noah disregarded the sneers of sinners for many years while he was building the ark. Lot obeyed the call of the Lord and quickly walked away from the uncleanness of Sodom and Gomorrah. Daniel disregarded people’s words and refused to bow to the idols of the king, similarly, the three youths whom God protected from the lions and the fiery pit. We should learn that the important issue is the testimony of God in our inner conscience, rather than man’s judgment - whoever he may be. For it is God who indicts, saves, and punishes, while man has no power whatsoever. The testimony of God in the conscience of Athanasius was more powerful than any worldly hallucinations. Consequently, when he was told that the whole world is against him, he inverted it and said, “and I am against the world.”

C. Pride and self-esteem

I could be self-confident and believe in my personality, opinions, and views of life. I could consider the cross as a mark of ignorance, weakness, and a stumbling block since it is actually weak for the sake of achieving love. The cross is a stumbling block because it does not share in the foolish wisdom of this world rather; the cross signifies sacrifice and endless giving. Under the cross, you learn true love and lay aside your selfishness and your pride and personal self-glorification. You learn gentleness and humility and find peace for your soul that has been fatigued by jealousy, hatred and envy towards others.

IV. The Labyrinth And The Failure To Specify Goals

The true Christian has a specific and fixed goal or destination that is founded on the Rock and not on sand. John the Baptist illustrates this by not giving in to any threats, and Jesus spoke about him saying, “he is not like straw carried by the winds.” A person may feel distracted and lost due to listening to all contradictor’s views and because he mingles with the wicked while anxiously desiring to preserve his spirituality. The Bible warns us through the words of St. Paul, who says, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind “through repentance”(Romans 12:2). We should be devoted in our love to God and beware of negotiating with the devil. Let us try to get away from his subjugation as a final issue and that can be done by God’s grace. Then we can say as Moses and the people of Israel said to Pharaoh, “there is no cloven hoof,” when he negotiated that they leave and then return. Through prayer and the obedience to spiritual leaders we are able to distinguish between the voice of our Shepherd and that of Satan.

V. Laziness

Although this seems to be an unreasonable cause, laziness could be a detrimental factor to spiritual perseverance. Therefore our Lord blessed the honest servant who is on vigil so that when his master comes he is still up and active. On the other hand, laziness leads to a diminishing state of the soul that has not exploited its talents or potentials, even though it has been made in the Likeness of God. A lazy person is like a still pool whose water has become stagnant and like a forsaken place where wolves can be heard. To oppose laziness we need to practice positive faith, and lovingly seek to study the history of saints and martyrs and the crown prepared for all those who conquer.

VI. False Starts

We should be on guard against Satan. When he sees our enthusiasm to make a spiritual start, he deceives us and makes us rush into adopting a certain attitude that is not spiritually correct. Some clarification of such behavior follows:

A. Ethical Teachings

These constitute one of the most popular false starts, since it adopts ethical behavior as a substitute for spirituality and faith necessary to lead a life with God. People championing ethical behavior describe spiritual life as rash and compulsive. They substitute worship of God with sweetness towards others. In its essence, Christianity is communion and acquaintance with our Lord and Savior. Within such a relationship, He blesses us with His righteousness, purity, holiness, and immortality. As for self-righteousness, resulting from ethical teachings, it is a dead issue as it proceeds from the self that is enslaved by sin and Satan for “He who is born of the flesh is flesh”. Consequently, those who declare, “God is our righteousness” are the ones who have been born “not of the blood (bride in descent or family lines) or of the will of the flesh (self righteousness) or of the will of man (ethical teachings), but are born of God. Their nature has been renewed by their union with Christ” (John 1:13). The Christian lives by grace and testifies to the truth “because grace and truth proceed from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Consequently, Christianity calls all who wish to be adorned with good manners and truly good acts to come and be filled with the Holy Spirit of God. It is He who fills man’s life with every virtue, righteousness and good deeds.

B. Sectarian Jealousy and Social Activities

These also constitute false starts. A person may imagine that a correct start would be to practice some kind of religious activity that serves the community. He does so through jealousy and not real love, whereas a good start requires repentance and self-repudiation. In fact, a true Christian realizes that Jesus Christ did not come to insure the interests of His believers or those of social parties for He said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” Sectarian conglomeration is, actually, a satanic substitute for true spiritual activity, as well as a fake form of religion adopted by a deceived person. It becomes clear that a correct start involves repentance and returning to God. In this way, a person becomes a member in the mysterious body of God who fills heaven and earth. This membership instigates man to seek to serve everyone and to deny all personal interests with respect to other people’s interests. For a Christian is the salt of the world, he dissolves to become adequate light to the world, burning to brighten the world without fanaticism or discrimination.

VII. The Correct Start Bears The Following Marks

- ❖ To love the Lord God with all my heart. This love enables me to put my trust in His blessed Person as the King, Shepherd and Bridegroom of my soul, and my eternal Friend. I enthrone Him in my heart and entrust His right Arm to purify it of all darkness and corruption.
- ❖ To hate sin and the advice of the wicked while persevering in repentance and constantly praying for the eternal and purifying grace of God.
- ❖ To love others and be concerned about them and all that is theirs rather than myself. For he who loves his brother has moved from darkness to Light. It is the experience of receiving communion with our fellow saints and the partaking of the body and blood of Jesus Christ that can truly develop brotherly spirit among us.

Let us, therefore, hurry to our Lord who is our Savior, our Redeemer, and our Righteousness so as to make a correct start with Him and to continue with Him. This is His promise. “And the one who comes to me, I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37).

Applications:

- ❖ Conduct a discussion on the signs of correct and incorrect aspects of religion.
- ❖ Discuss the value of manners, from the human aspect, as opposed to the fruit of the work of God’s Spirit in man.
- ❖ Discuss the impediments to repentance and its challenge in the life of youth.
- ❖ Assign to some students the task of preparing material on the lives of some figures who have repented.
- ❖ Assign to some students the task of collecting verses depicting God’s acceptance of penitents and the examples He has given to portray them.

Week 4 - The Song of Songs

Prayer:

May the Lord fill our hearts with His love as He loved us and loved His church. May we learn from Him the real and true love, which is stronger than any human love.

Objective:

- ❖ To learn about the content of this book
- ❖ To understand the spiritual value of this book and the spiritual meanings behind the love expressions in the book.

Memory Verse:

“My beloved spoke and said to me: Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away” (Song of Songs 2:1).

References:

- ❖ The Song of Songs - Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty.
- ❖ The Song of Songs - Bishop Youanis.

Introduction:

Many people misunderstand the book “Song of Songs”; also known as the “Song of Solomon”, and get tangled in its descriptions of physical beauty and love words. This can be misleading to many of us, especially the youth. A correct understanding of the purpose of this book and the meanings behind its love story is very important for our spiritual growth and love for God who loved us first (1 John 4:19).

Lesson Outline:

Solomon wrote 1,005 songs (1 Kings 4:32), but this beautiful eulogy of love stood out among them as the “Song of Songs”. The Song of Solomon is a love song written by Solomon and abounds in metaphors and oriental imagery. Historically, it depicts the wooing and wedding of a shepherdess by King Solomon and the joy and heartaches of wedded love.

Allegorically, in the Old Testament, Israelis regarded as the bride of Yahweh (Isaiah 54:5, Jeremiah 2:2, Ezekiel 16:8-14, Hosea 2:16-20). In the New Testament, the church is seen as the bride of Christ (2 Corinthians 11:2; Ephesians 5:23-25; Revelation 19:7-9; 21:9). The Song of Songs illustrates the former and anticipates the latter.

As human life finds its highest fulfillment in the love of man and woman, so the spiritual life finds its highest fulfillment in the love of God for His people, the human spirit, and in His church.

The book is arranged like scenes in a drama with three speakers: Bride (Shulamite the Church or the human spirit), The King (Solomon-- God) and Chorus (daughters of Jerusalem). It demonstrates sudden changes of speakers but they are not identified. This song was written primarily from the point of view of the Shulamite, but Solomon was its author. The Shulamite addresses the king as “my

beloved” and the king addresses his bride as “my love”. The daughters of Jerusalem were probably attendants to the Shulamite. The term Shulamite appear only once in 6:13, and it may be driven from the town of Shunem, which was southwest of the Sea of Galilee in the tribal area of Issachar. This poetic book is made of 8 chapters beautifully depicting the love of a married couple. The beginning of love is found in 1:1-5:1 and the broadening of love is found in 5:2-8:14.

I. The Beginning Of Love (1:1-5:1)

King Solomon has a vineyard in the country of the Shulamite (6:13; 8:11). The Shulamite must work in the vineyard with her brothers (1:6; 8:11-12). When King Solomon visits the area he wins her heart and takes her to his palace in Jerusalem as his bride. She is tanned from hours of work outside in the vineyard but she is fairest among women (1:6,8).

II. Chapters 1-3 Give A Series Of Recollections Of The Courtship

- ❖ The bride’s longing for affection at the palace before the wedding (1:2-8).
- ❖ Expression of a mutual love in the banquet hall (1:9 -2:7).
- ❖ A springtime visit from the king to the bride’s home in the country (2:8-17).
- ❖ The Shulamite’s troubled dream of separation from her beloved (3:1-5).
- ❖ The bride’s wedding procession from the bride’s home to Jerusalem (3:6-11).

In chapter 4, King Solomon praises his bride’s beauty from head to toe. Her virginity is like a garden that is entered when the marriage is consummated (4:16-5:1).

III. The Broadening Of Love (5:2-8:14)

Some time after the wedding the Shulamite has a troubled dream (5:2) in the palace while Solomon is away. In her dream, Solomon comes to her door, but she answers too late; only after he is gone does she open the door. She panics and reaches for him late at night in Jerusalem. Upon his return, Solomon assures her of his love and praises her beauty (6:4-7:10).

Then Shulamite begins to think of her country home and tries to persuade her beloved to return there with her (7:11-8:4). The journey takes place in 8:5-7 and their relationship continues to deepen.

Applications:

- ❖ Read a commentary or meditate on a book about the Song of Songs to understand the spiritual meaning of this book.

Conclusion:

The love of God to the church and the human soul is beyond any description and any human love relationship. However, there is no language (that man knows) that can express this relationship except the words of love and passion.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF JANUARY

Week 1- Jesus Christ is the Fulfillment of the Prophecies

Week 2- Love and Maturity

Week 3- The Epistle to Philemon

Week 4- The Life of Praise

Week 1 - Jesus Christ Is the Fulfillment of the Prophecies

Objective:

- ❖ The clarification of prophecies about Jesus Christ as the central issue of the Holy Bible, and the way these have been fulfilled by the coming of Christ.

Memory verse:

“For I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it” (Luke 10:24).

Lesson Outline:

I. Definition of “A Prophecy”

It is the announcement of matters before their occurrence and it is inspired by God - “And Aaron your brother shall be your prophet” (Exodus 7:1), “Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth” (Exodus 4:15).

II. Were There Prophecies About Christ In The Old Testament (El Torah)?

Yes Christ is in all its books and in every verse. All the lines and words are nothing but glorious reflections of Jesus Christ.

III. The Prophecies Concerning Jesus Christ

They are so numerous and include details concerning His life and His Divine Person that you can get to know all the specifics from the Old Testament. The following are some of the most important prophecies that have been fulfilled by the coming of Christ:

Prophecy	Old Testament	New Testament
Place of birth	Micah 5:2	Matthew 2:1-6
God Incarnate	Isaiah 9:6	John 1:14
Born of a virgin	Isaiah 7:14	Matthew 1:8-23
Sold for silver	Zechariah 11:12	Matthew 26:14-15
False testimonies against Him	Psalms 35:11	Matthew 26:59-60
His fall under the Cross	Psalms 109:24	John 19:17
Giving Him vinegar and gall	Psalms 61:21	Mark 27:34
Giving up the Spirit	Psalms 31:5	Luke 23:46
Darkness on His crucifixion	Amos 8:9	Matthew 27:45
His resurrection	Psalms 16:10; 22:22	Matthew 28, 1 Corinthians 15
His ascension	Psalms 4:7; 68:18	Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9

IV. Christ And The Phases Of Prophecy Are Explained Below

- ❖ From Adam to Moses: references to the Redeemer were made, besides specification of the person and tribe of which Christ will come.
- ❖ From Moses to Christ: in this phase the rituals and rites were set down then the Psalms and the redemption. The time and conditions in which Christ would come are defined accompanied by accurate calculations and specific testimonials.
- ❖ Christ and the Church: in this phase the prophecies indicate the growth of faith and of the Church, the destruction of the temple, and finally the new earth and heaven.

V. The Testimony of the Holy Books for Christ

- ❖ His redeeming work: “Shall bruise the head of the serpent” (Genesis 3:15).
- ❖ Christ’s origin: from the line of Abraham (Genesis 23:18), and from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10), and from the stem of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1).
- ❖ A man of sufferings: acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3). He was beaten, lashed and spit upon (Isaiah 50:6). His cry on the Cross: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Psalm 22:1).
- ❖ He will also arise: He rose victorious over death (Psalm 16:10). Just as the prophecies concerning the past have been fulfilled, so will those concerning the future. “Surely, I am coming quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Revelation 22:20).

Applications:

- ❖ Stimulate the desire of youth to complete the search for the other prophecies and verses that have been fulfilled in the New Testament.
- ❖ Undertake a study or research about Christ in any one book in the Holy Bible (Old or New Testament).
- ❖ Deepen the foundation of faith in the minds of youth, as they need to believe in the prophecies. This is an area that helps to prepare them in receiving Jesus as the Redeemer, Savior, and constant friend living within them by the grace of the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ Deepen the meaning of prophecies concerning the future and organize conferences that focus upon the new resurrection and the confirmed victory of God’s children. They will be victorious because, while still living in this world they are sure of their eternal inheritance which according to the prophecies will be fulfilled by His second coming.

Week 2 - Love and Maturity

Objective:

- ❖ To clarify the true meaning of the holy marital love.

Memory verse:

“I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16).

Introduction:

One of the words that have been greatly corrupted by the world is that of “love”. This is so true that it is very hard to dismantle all the false meanings and delinquent trends associated with it in the writings and words of many.

Lesson Outline:

I. What Is The Difference Between True Love And Evil Lust?

True love is to want another person not as an object to be possessed. It is a life of sharing whose basis is devotion and freedom. It is more like “light.”

Lust, on the other hand, is contact with someone else on the level of the body. This is often done in the absence of spiritual unity. Love is not physical lust. Physical contact is not a means to unity, for both bodies remain separate even after contact. Consequently, lovers face each other without containing or possessing one another. As a result, they realize that physical love has not succeeded in unifying them together, especially and as long as each finds himself/herself reverting to his/her original isolation after physical contact is over.

In the Holy Bible, we have an example of such an instance. We see how Amnon lusted for Tamar, Absalom’s sister, being driven by strong physical desire. After taking her, the Bible tells us that: “Then Amnon hated her exceedingly so that the hatred with which he hated her was greater than the love with which he loved her” (2 Samuel 13:15).

It is clear that lust arises from impulsiveness, rashness, and violent reactions. Love, on the other hand, is self-giving, respectful, controlled, and rational.

II. What, Then, Are The Constituents Of True Sexual Love?

A. Physical maturity

Since the body plays a role in marital life.

B. Psychological maturity

Indicated by the liberation from all psychological bonds that impede the projection of the personality. By maturity we mean spiritual progress and appreciation of the communal life and acquaintance with God. It also implies the stand that youth take in opposition of his whims and bad inclinations.

C. Fullness

A personality that experiences inner fullness is rich, optimistic, and positive. Moreover, it is free from psychological complexes or hallucinations. Consequently, it is capable of loving.

D. Divine love

Real love, which arises from divine love and pours into a youth's heart by the Holy Spirit, is capable of sanctifying his feelings, thoughts and senses. Thus he is qualified for holy matrimony and its pure bed.

E. Freedom

- ❖ Internal freedom: This is liberation from the slavery of the self, lust, bad habits, past imprints and outcome of early education. If each lover feels that he/she is offering himself/herself to the other freely and with appreciation, then this ascertains a happy marital life. Besides, it strengthens the ties of love and unity
- ❖ External Liberation: There should not be any kind of external factors causing pressure upon the choice made by a partner. This arises from an insistence to choose from a certain family or of certain financial standard, or from within the family circle of either the father or the mother.

F. Attraction and inspiration

When person is physically minded, then he will be attracted by physical considerations. When a person is temperamental, then physical matters attract him. When he is spiritual, then the attraction is due to spiritual aspects in the other person. Furthermore, it must be clear that the physical and psychological factors are subject to the spiritual outlook to the divine inspiration and the true Christian spiritual inclinations.

G. Marital commitment

There is no love without marriage, and no marriage without love. This is true because love outside marriage carries the germ of self-destruction. The human soul cannot cancel sexual love from its natural physical expression since a real sexual love is meaningless without a child and a family.

III. Is It Essential To Have Love Before Marriage?

Love develops and is perfected in marriage, even though it begins before that. It is therefore important for a person, choosing a wife, to feel psychologically and spiritually inclined towards that partner, besides being emotionally attracted to her. It is necessary for each of them to feel that there is mutual harmony in their likes and in their inclinations. Furthermore, each one of them should be fully prepared to be self-giving, devoted and self-sacrificing.

The Church has set, accordingly, a period of engagement during which a couple gets to know one another within a framework of respect, holiness, decency and devoid of any artificiality. They get to know the goals, principles, trends and challenges. Besides, they learn how to face difficulties and walk in the light leading to marriage.

IV. The Characteristics Of Christian Marital Love

- ❖ Not self centered but rather self-sacrificing and focused on devotion (self-giving). Laying down oneself for the others without any expectation of reward or benefit.
- ❖ Unaccountable love is not defined by certain motives. Rather, it exists and its core arises from the mystery of the inner love, which is creative and accepts the loved one as he/she is.

- ❖ Sanctifies physical instincts and redeems them since it considers that the sexual relationship between a couple is not hateful in the eyes of God. In fact, He is the reason for the spiritual love that fills a couple's hearts, unifying them in a wonderful spiritual relationship.
- ❖ A demure unimpulsive love that is not rash or delinquent. Love that realizes the commitment of marital love and is aware of all its difficulties. Love that is capable of passing through hardships, however great.
- ❖ A realistic love that is devoid of imagination and of delinquent dreams. Love that is cautious and kind and at the same time unselfish, envious or boastful (1 John 4:18).
- ❖ Strong love, as strong as death (Song of Songs 5:6). Love that draws upon the divine love for its existence (John 17:16).
- ❖ Comprehensive love that has a transparency that perceives the soul of the loved one as light. This love brings a couple so close that they learn to know each other to a degree that cannot be attained except by lovers. The beauty of such love is that it eliminates distance between the couple.
- ❖ A fruitful overflowing love. Love is a creative powerful function that produces more love. In the process, it overflows to bear a blessed fruit in the form of a child and the marital love will expand and become motherly and fatherly love.
- ❖ Love overpowers and conquers death. The joy the Holy Spirit pours into the hearts of a married couple renews the body and ascertains perpetual union. If we say that marital love lasts forever, then what did the Lord mean when He told the Sadducees "For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage." Does this mean that marriage, in all its aspects, will disappear? Actually, all that is related to the physical material world will disappear, such as sexual matters. Yet the essence of marriage remains, for example, harmony and understanding.

In general, Christian marital love follows the pattern of the Lord's love to the Church. It is a gift of divine inspiration and a mystery that unites a man and a woman together. They undertake to live inseparably even through death.

We see therefore that the words of the apostle are not a coincidence when he speaks about marital love within the context of Christ's love to the Church, "husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her" (Ephesians 5:23-25).

Applications:

- ❖ Discuss the difference between true Christian love, lust and physical infatuation.
- ❖ A comparison would be useful in clarifying our marital and sexual values in contrast to western values, which differ totally. In the latter, sexual immorality and extramarital matters are allowed with no pure ecclesiastical obligations.
- ❖ The students could conduct research work related to these topics, based on books about sex and its humane concept, and about the mystery of love, the life of chastity, Christianity and the body, etc.
- ❖ Students could read through the prayers of holy matrimony and draw out all the petitions for sanctifying the love and union of the married couples.

Week 3 - The Epistle to Philemon

Objective:

- ❖ To train students on studying the Holy Bible.

Memory Verse:

“Yes, brother, let me have joy from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in the Lord” (Philemon 1:20).

Introduction:

This is a personal letter from St. Paul addressed to his friend Philemon. It concerns his slave, Onesimus, who escaped from his master Philemon and who met St. Paul in Rome. There he was converted by St. Paul, repented, and was baptized. After some time, St. Paul sent him back to Philemon with this letter (or epistle).

Although this is a short epistle, it is very sweet. It bears the sweetness of the apostolic spirit that is full of love. Between the lines there is the practical application of Christian principles. The following may be noted:

- ❖ The Divine fatherly love is apparent as it binds the shepherd with his sheep in Jesus Christ. The highest degree of love is embodied in the concern for every single member as an important individual.
- ❖ The spirit of love embracing his friend is clear. Although he commands him, yet he does so with a humble and broken spirit. Before requesting him to love Onesimus, St. Paul overflows with love towards Philemon. Moreover, he gives Philemon the opportunity to forgive voluntarily, and therefore sends the slave back to him, voluntarily bearing this letter.
- ❖ By reading the letter the apostolic spirit prevailing in the Church becomes apparent. It mirrors the full and positive employment of all potentials in and through Jesus Christ.

I. Who is Philemon?

- ❖ He was either born in Colossus or was raised there.
- ❖ He probably met St. Paul in Ephesus, or when the apostle went to Colossus, and was converted by him.
- ❖ He was anointed bishop over Colossus.

II. Place And Time Of Writing The Epistle To Philemon

It was written at the time of St. Paul's first imprisonment. It was sent from Rome, together with the epistle to the Colossians approximately in the year 62 or 63 A D. This is based on the following:

- ❖ The apostle mentions that he is a prisoner (Philemon 1:1,10,21).
- ❖ St. Paul speaks about his hope to be released, and asks Philemon to prepare to accommodate him (Philemon 1:22).
- ❖ Onesimus himself was the one who carried the letter to Colossus.

- ❖ The persons mentioned in this letter are the same ones mentioned in the epistle to the Colossians and who sent their love.

Lesson Outline:

I. Main Sections Of The Letter

- ❖ Apostolic salutations (verses 1-3).
- ❖ The apostle's love to his friend (verses 4-7).
- ❖ The apostle's supplications on behalf of Onesimus (verses 8-21).
- ❖ Closing greetings (verses 22-25).

A. Apostolic salutations

In the introduction of the letter, St. Paul calls himself a “slave” rather than an “apostle”.

- ❖ In order to stimulate Philemon's tender affections towards himself (St. Paul).
- ❖ In order to announce the common features shared between himself and Onesimus and therefore the treatment they both deserve.
- ❖ In order to allow Philemon the opportunity to accept Onesimus not on account of an obliging apostolic command but on account of love that is voluntary.

In sending greetings of peace, the apostle gives special attention to every individual, as far as he possibly can. Thus he pays attention to the following:

- ❖ To Philemon, by calling him ‘our beloved friend and fellow laborer,’ since Philemon is a partner in apostolic work. As such, he is bound to adopt the spirit of a mature minister.
- ❖ To Philemon's wife, as a chaste and virgin person, the apostle is unashamed to call all men and women his beloved since his heart is devoted to all mankind. Moreover, he loves them specifically in Jesus Christ, and as an elderly man.
- ❖ To Philemon's son “Archippus, our fellow soldier” and is thus described as a fellow worker participating in the same work, even though he is a young man and a deacon. St. Paul pays great attention to him.
- ❖ Having mentioned all Philemon's parents and relatives by name St. Paul finally says: “to the Church in your house.” By this, he is referring to all the believers who gathered in Philemon's home.

B. The apostle's love of his friend

The apostle is used to behaving according to the Spirit of Christ. We find him, accordingly, pouring his love to his friend before issuing orders.

He reveals the inner depth of his love to Philemon that is embodied in the following:

- ❖ Although he is fettered in chains, he does not forget to mention Philemon in his prayers.
- ❖ In spite of his troubles he follows his friend's news. Thus, he hears about his faith in Jesus Christ and his love of all the saints.
- ❖ His admiration for Philemon motivates him to thank God every moment on his account.
- ❖ St. Paul was not alone in his joy over Philemon as he says: “For we have great joy and consolation in your love.”

How sweet is the love and unity of the Church! It rejoices greatly, and is consoled by the love of its shepherds and its flock, and by their spiritual growth.

C. The apostle's request on behalf of Onesimus

After this introduction kindled with love, the apostle starts pleading on behalf of Onesimus. He uses wisdom and accordingly supports and strengthens his words as he depends on Jesus Christ. Through Him he is made bold not to ask but to command "what is fitting" in Christ.

The reason and mystery underlying why the request, or rather, the command is fitting is as follows:

- ❖ Love obliges Philemon to accept Onesimus. Thus St. Paul says: "for love's sake I appeal to you - being such a one as Paul the aged." The word "aged" here conveys the authority of fatherly priesthood.
- ❖ The new position of Onesimus: The request is fitting in the light of Onesimus' new status, becoming a believer and being baptized. He has become St. Paul's son, the son of the aged, the son of chains.
- ❖ Onesimus' new characteristics: The change did not stop at his becoming St. Paul's son but his very characteristics changed. According to the apostle's words "who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me."
- ❖ To enable Philemon to do good voluntarily and not by compulsion St. Paul, as a good shepherd does not allow Philemon to miss the opportunity of forgiving Onesimus willingly and voluntarily.
- ❖ The revelation of God's will in the incident: God's children are aware that their lives consist of a series of opportunities, which the Lord provides and from which they could benefit. It is therefore appropriate that Philemon asks himself: Why has God allowed Onesimus to rob him and run away? The escape of Onesimus was turned into an opportunity for him to progress from a state of temporal slavery to an eternal relationship with his master Philemon. Indeed, it was an association with St. Paul and the whole Church as well.
- ❖ St. Paul speaks and makes up for him. I consider Onesimus as though he were myself. Therefore, I ask you to receive him without asking him to return what he has stolen ... "if he has wronged you or owes you anything, put that on my account". This is a promise that St. Paul puts down in his own handwriting and therefore is trustworthy.
- ❖ St. Paul wishes to rejoice at heart on account of Philemon himself. The apostle sets this motive in view and consequently makes a reasonable request - he wishes to rejoice that he is in the Lord. As proof Philemon is enabled to obey His Commandments.

D. Closing greetings

The apostle concludes this epistle, which is filled with love, as follows:

- ❖ He asks for the preparation of a guestroom for him. He conveys the salutations of those ministering with him and these are: "Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke."
- ❖ He ends his letter in prayer. That is the most beneficial issue as he says "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."

Week 4 - The Life of Praise

Objective:

- ❖ To reveal the value of giving praise as being an occasion to worship God.
- ❖ To underline its strong association with the personality of David, the singing shepherd.

Memory verse:

“I will praise the Lord according to His righteousness, and will sing praise to the name of the Lord Most High” (Psalm 7:17).

Lesson Outline:

David is a Hebrew name meaning “loved”. He is the son of Jesse of Bethlehem and the second king to rule Israel. He was born in the village of Bethlehem from an Ephrathite out of the tribe of Judah. He was beautiful as he was fair and had pretty eyes. He was also strong and courageous. In his youth, he killed a lion and a bear that attacked the flock he was guarding and saved the lamb from their cruelty. Furthermore, he killed the giant Goliath, while he was still young. This saved his people from shame before their enemies. Samuel the prophet anointed him on God’s orders as Israel’s king when God rejected Saul. Saul, meanwhile, followed David in an attempt to kill him, but God saved David from his hands. Then Saul was killed and David became king of Israel.

God praised David and said, “I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart” (Acts 13:22). A chain of kings followed from the house of David, from whom Jesus Christ the Son of God came to save mankind. David was considered “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1). He was named the writer of the Psalms as he said most of them while filled with the spirit of prophecy. They are full of prophecies concerning the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ incarnate and His redeeming death, as well as His ascension into Heaven and presence on the right of the Father.

David was a clear symbol of Christ from birth, for Christ was born in David’s small city of Bethlehem. David was born in a humble house just like the Lord who left His throne to become a servant. He was honest in his work as a shepherd symbolizing the good Shepherd. The envy of Saul towards David represents the envy of the Pharisees towards Jesus. David loved music and he played the harp with great skill (1 Samuel 16:18,23). It was David who set the order of service in the holy places of God (2 Chronicles 6:31). He lived for seventy years, thirty before kingship and forty after being king. He then died in peace and his son Solomon reigned after him. The Church remembers David on the twenty-second day of Kiahk, may his prayers be with us, Amen.

I. David and Praise

David was constantly preoccupied with God. In his worship, therefore, he constantly praises and sings as that is the best way of expressing a combination of feelings and meaningful words. All the songs of praise in the Bible spoken by holy saints were inspired by the Holy Spirit. This is because prayer and praise proceeding from the soul is a sign and proclamation of the reciprocity of the will and the grace of God that is poured on it.

A. Praise in the life of David is a characteristic that distinguishes the life of a Christian

David presents a living example of Christian life. David once said, “By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down” (Psalm 136). He and his comrades could not offer praise as they were estranged from the city of the Lord, Jerusalem. This refers to the lack or regression of love in the heart of a Christian due to his estrangement from God and absence of a relationship with Him. Consequently, love gradually cool down, and the heart stops giving praise or thanks to God.

II. Christ And Praise In The Psalms Of David

The Psalms of David are a treasure that contains all modes of prayer.

- Thanksgiving: The Lord is my light (Psalm 27).
 The Lord is my Shepherd (Psalm 23).
 Lord. You have been favorable (Psalm 85).
- Humility: Psalm 150.
- Glorification: O Lord, how excellent is Your name (Psalm 8); Praise the Lord....

The book of Psalms is one of the most beautiful and deepest books, which speaks of the Lord. It is often referred to as the book of Jesus Christ, as He lives in the Psalms through symbols and signs:

- ❖ The Lord and Shepherd (Psalm 22:23).
- ❖ Christ the Rock of the Ages (Psalm 17:5; Psalm 31:2-3; Psalm 40:2).
- ❖ The Light of the world (Psalm 27:1; Psalm 18:27).
- ❖ The Redeemer (Psalm 19:12-14; Psalm 69:15).
- ❖ The King (Psalm 2:6-8; Psalm 20).
- ❖ The Son of God (Psalm 2:10).
- ❖ The Priest (Psalm 110, Psalm 40).
- ❖ His suffering (Psalm 22; Psalm 35:11).
- ❖ His resurrection (Psalm 16:5-10; Psalm 110).

Applications:

- ❖ Have the Book of the Psalmody at hand and quote some of the expressions used for praise.
- ❖ Encourage the youth to join the service of praise with the chorus and their leader, and to begin devoting a short time, then gradually increasing the time to avoid boredom.
- ❖ Stimulate their enthusiasm to learn a few short songs of praise.
- ❖ Remove the problem and barrier of the Coptic and Arabic languages by publishing short explanations in English to the words of the songs of praise, until there is a scope to learn the languages in the summertime.

BEGINNING OF FEBRUARY TILL JONAH'S FAST

Use Filler Lessons (placed at the beginning of the book) until the Sunday before Jonah's fast.

LESSONS FOR JONAH'S FAST

Jonah's fast comes two weeks before the Great Lent on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. These lessons are for the Sunday before and the Sunday after Jonah's fast.

Week before Fast: Christianity and Psychological Health

Week after Fast: Ecumenical Councils

Week before Fast - The Christian and Psychological Health

Objective:

- ❖ Christianity fulfills deeply the various psychological needs.

Memory verse:

“There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love” (1 John 4:18).

References:

- ❖ 1 John 4:7-21; 5:1-3
- ❖ 1 Corinthians 13:1-8

Lesson Outline:

Psychological health implies the complete harmony and integration among psychological functions leading to a positive feeling of happiness. The meaning of harmony is the absence of inner conflict within a person and the presence of principles governing his life (religious, social, moral). These principles provide a way out of the conflicts. Being unable to resolve these conflicts properly leads to tension, anxiety, and loss of self-confidence.

Christianity gives sufficient and fulfilling remuneration to the personality (2 Corinthians 12:9). This is true as the grace of Christ compensates for all deficiencies in man (Luke 3:5). Man possesses extraordinary power through Christ and through the salvation and redemption that has been granted to him in the New Testament.

It is possible to enumerate psychological needs as being:

I. The Need For Security

Christianity fills the souls with security and safety to an extent that is beyond the mind's conception. This is due to the peace God grants to the soul thus shielding it from the penetration of anxieties or pain. Such peace filled the heart of St. Peter when he was in prison.

II. The Need For Love And Tenderness

- ❖ A child can never have enough of his parents' love for him... he loves himself and grows selfish and unable to love others.
- ❖ Spiritual life fulfills the need for love: for God is love. And when God dwells in the heart. He fills it with love for others who would spontaneously love him in return.
- ❖ Love is the mother of all virtues.

III. The Need For Appreciation

A person grows with the need for others to appreciate him. A child deprived of being appreciated grows with weak self-confidence. He dreads new situations, and expects failure in any task he sets out to do.

For the children of God the need for appreciation is fulfilled on the divine level. It does not matter if that need is or is not satisfied socially. The true Christian finds that the most honorable thing is to be considered the child of God and the heir of His kingdom.

The Christian, consequently, disregards external appearance be it of position, status or authority. Although these are useful and could be exploited by God's help, yet they do not fulfill the need of the soul for appreciation, since the Holy Spirit already inhabits it and satisfies all its needs.

IV. The Need For Freedom

Freedom is an important psychological need that plays an essential role in the edification of a wholesome personality. There is the condition, however, that such freedom should be within a correct framework.

God created man as a free being in His image. Hence, Youth, who call for freedom, express an internal yearning implanted by God Himself within each person. Christ also clarified that there is an inner freedom that He spoke about in John 8:31-36.

The Lord explained that when man fell, he enslaved himself to many inward and outward matters such as:

A. Sin

By committing sin, one is enslaved to it *"Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin"* (John 8:34). St. Paul explains how God liberated us from sin (Romans 5 and 6).

B. Fear (Hebrews 2:14,15; Romans 8:15-17)

In these passages St. Paul explains how the Lord liberated us from fear. Also St. John says, *"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment"* (1 John 4:18).

C. The Law

We were bound by the Law but now we have been set free from it (Romans 7).

V. External Matters That Bind Us

External matters that bind us involves our surrender to Satan, the world, people, and different thoughts. A spiritually oriented person experiences in his life, in sublime ways, how the Lord has liberated us from such influences. We also observe this in the lives of the saints. St. Augustine explains this mystery in his words: 'I have come to live above the world when I no longer fear things, or lust for anything.' Thus freedom is not an opportunity for the flesh (Galatians 5:3), but man is the one who controls himself (Hebrews 12:4).

Moreover, the obedience of the law in one's spiritual life does not bind a person's freedom. Praying using the Agpeya or being generally religious does not confine one's liberty. On the contrary, such matters assist the enjoyment of a liberty that is mature and free of weaknesses.

Applications:

- ❖ Study the Holy Word and experience its power: "for the word I speak are spirit and life."
- ❖ Experience the power of prayer using the Agpeya and persevere in it, even though it seems hard at the start.
- ❖ Persevere in confession, as it is a positive power in regulating the direction of our life, and also observe communion regularly.

- ❖ Be willing to take on some kind of responsibility and be involved in the weekly meetings of youth. This provides a friendly atmosphere. Also aim on channeling your individual effort with young people in order to help them and deliver to them the message of the Lord's love.

Week after Jonah's Fast - Ecumenical Councils

Objective:

- ❖ To learn about the major ecumenical councils and their role in defending the Christian faith from the different heresies.

Memory verse:

“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4).

Lesson outline:

I. What Do Ecumenical Councils Mean?

They are meetings held for the Bishops of all the Christian Sees in the whole world. They are held when urgent matters arise, such as strange teachings that could cause disruption or division within the Church.

II. Conditions To Be Observed In Ecumenical Councils

- ❖ They are to be held whenever there is heresy or division.
- ❖ They are called by a Christian Emperor.
- ❖ They are attended by the majority of the Bishops in the east and west so as to ensure global representation.
- ❖ They are to be held whenever a new issue is to be determined which had not been discussed before.

III. The Above Conditions Apply To Three Councils Only

- ❖ The Council of Nicene.
- ❖ The Council of Constantinople.
- ❖ The Council of Ephesus.

The importance of such councils arises from the fact that the Church wishes to insure that it draws its doctrines from the following principal sources:

- ❖ The Holy Bible.
- ❖ Apostolic doctrines.
- ❖ Ecumenical councils.

Consequently, the Church respects these councils and is blessed by them, as well as by their decisions and saintly members. This is due to the belief that these councils ensure that the Church is built on very strong foundations.

IV. What Are The Specific Domains Of These Councils?

- ❖ The investigation of issues related to the faith (To ensure the correct delivery of its teachings and doctrines).
- ❖ Setting down the regulations and laws necessary for the policies of the Church.
- ❖ Solving the problems that face the Church and ending disputes among the clergy or the congregation or between both of them.
- ❖ Bringing to trial the clergymen who deviated from, or contradicted the faith.

V. What Is The First Council In Christianity?

The First council was held in Jerusalem and was presided by the apostle James, Bishop of Jerusalem in the year 50-51 AD (Acts 15:6-29). The purpose of the council was to study the conditions imposed upon the Gentiles as a prerequisite to their conversion into Christianity. Some apostles agreed that a Gentile should fulfill the doctrines of Moses concerning circumcision first, and then become a Christian by accepting baptism. St. Paul, however, felt that faith in Jesus Christ transcends the Jewish ordinance and all the apostles accepted his opinion.

VI. A Comparison Among The Three Ecumenical Councils

	The council of Nicene	The council of Constantinople	The council of Ephesus
Year	325 AD.	381 AD.	431 AD.
Number of attendants	318 Bishops	150 Bishops	200 Bishops
Place	City of Nicene	City of Constantinople	City of Ephesus
Presiding emperor	Constantine the Great	Theodosius the Great	Theodosius the Young
Name of heretic	Arius, an Alexandrian priest	Macedonius, anointed Bishop of Constantinople	Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople
Important persons in the council	St. Athanasius the Apostle, a deacon at that time	Patriarch Theodosius, Pope of Alexandria. Abba Malathius of Antioch. St. Gregory The Enlightener, and St. Gregory of Nyssa.	St. Cyril the great (Pillar of faith), Pope of Alexandria
The heresy	The denial of Christ’s divinity as he claimed that the Son (Word) is not One with the Father in essence.	The denial of the essence of the Holy Spirit as he stated that the Holy Spirit is not a person of the Holy Trinity, distinct from the Father or the Son, but a creature similar to angels.	He claimed that in Jesus Christ there are two persons or entities and two natures. He also refuted the designation of the Holy Virgin Mary as the mother of God. In other words he denied

			the union of humanity and divinity.
Most important laws issued by the council	The issuance of the Creed: “We believe in One God ... whose kingdom shall have no end”.	The completion of the Creed of faith, by adding: “Yes, we believe in the Holy Spirit”.	The introduction to the Creed of faith was written: “We magnify you, O mother of the True Light”.

These three councils are the ones accepted by the Coptic Orthodox Church. However, others councils were held later on by others churches

VII. The Council of Ephesus

- ❖ It was held in 443 AD to issue a judgment on the heresy of Eutyches who was the head of the monastery near Constantinople. At first, he was a fervent defender of the faith, opposing the doctrines of Nestorius. However, he suddenly swerved to the opposite camp and claimed that Christ’s humanity (manhood) vanished into His divinity (Godhood) so that He had one integrated nature.
- ❖ When the council was held, presided by Pope Discorus, Eutyches attended it to clarify his doctrine. It proved to be consistent with the true, which is the Nicene faith. His innocence was, therefore, announced and he returned to his monastery. He later denied the faith and the council then produced the following decree: “for the second time, we reinforce our statement and belief in the one nature of the Incarnate Word, without mingling or confusion or alteration”.

A. What is the belief of the Coptic Church concerning the nature of Jesus Christ?

The Coptic Orthodox Church believes that the Lord Jesus Christ is God Himself; the Incarnate Logos Who took to Himself a perfect manhood. His Divine nature is one with his human nature yet without mingling, confusion or alteration, a complete Hypostatic Union. As this union is permanent, never divided nor separated, we pray in the Coptic Liturgy that His Divinity parted not from His Humanity for a single moment nor even for a twinkle of an eye. The Divine nature (God the Word) was united with the human nature, which He took of the Virgin Mary, by the action of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit purified and sanctified the Virgin’s womb so that the Child to whom she gave birth would inherit nothing of the original sin; the flesh formed of her blood was united with the Only-Begotten Son. This Unity took place from the first moment of the Holy Pregnancy in the Virgin’s womb. As a result of the unity of both natures-the Divine and the human-inside the Virgin’s womb, one nature was formed out of both: “The One Nature of God the Incarnate Logos” as St. Cyril called it. After the schism, which took place in the year 451 A.D., when the Coptic Orthodox Church rejected the motions of the Council of Calcedon and its theological struggles, we were wrongly called Monophysites. However, the union in which the non-Calcedonian Orthodox Churches believe differs essentially from the union, which the Eutyches believe. Eutyches said that our Lord is one nature, but His union is based on a notion that the humanity of Christ is totally absorbed in His Divinity and vanishes completely like a drop of vinegar in the ocean. In this way, the Eutyches in fact, deny the real existence of the human nature of Christ. The Coptic Church condemns the absolute monophysitism of Eutyches as heresy.

VIII. Other Councils - The Council Of Chalcedon

It was held in 451 AD in the city of Chalcedon in Asia Minor and was attended by emperor Markian and his wife. It was concerned with the discussion of the laws laid by the second council of Ephesus, and particularly two problems:

- a. The pardon of Eutyches and the confirmation concerning the one nature of Jesus Christ.
- b. The neglect of reading the letter of Lakan the Nestorian Bishop of Rome.

During the first session, they could not resist the argument brought forward by Pope Dioscorus. They then held a second session without him, and issued incriminating verdicts after they had confessed in the first session and had said: "We have sinned and ask for forgiveness". The Pope had also told them: "As for me. I do not hesitate or falter one moment in the belief of the universal. Apostolic Church and I am interested in nothing else but the salvation of my soul and the protection of the true doctrines and upright faith".

This attitude of the Council led to the beginning of the divisions in the Church. Two big parties were formed: the Orthodox Churches which included the followers of Pope Dioscorus and which continued to adhere to their doctrines (called non-Chalcedonian) and the Chalcedonian Churches.

A. The hope for the unification of the Churches and their restoration to order preceding the division

There is hope that the Church becomes universal and apostolic so that all Christians become one flock of one shepherd.

Applications:

- ❖ What is meant by ecumenical councils? In general, what are the causes leading to holding them?
- ❖ Compare among the three ecumenical councils of Nicene, Constantinople, and Ephesus in the light of the heresy they fought against. What were their most important decrees?
- ❖ Clarify briefly the heroic roles of St. Athanasius, St. Cyril, and St. Dioscorus in strengthening the Orthodox faith. What title did each deserve?
- ❖ Clarify the role of ecumenical councils in the history of the Church.

LESSONS FOR THE GREAT LENT PERIOD

- Week 0:** (Preparation week) - **The Vanity of the World**
- Week 1:** (Surrender to the Heavenly Father) - **Monasticism**
- Week 2:** (Sunday of Temptation) - **Overview of the Pauline Epistles (I)**
- Week 3:** (Sunday of the Prodigal Sun) - **Overview of the Pauline Epistles (II)**
- Week 4:** (Sunday of the Samaritan Woman) - **My Need for Jesus Christ**
- Week 5:** (Sunday of The Sick of Bethesda) - **The redeeming Suffering of Our Lord**
- Week 6:** (Sunday of The born blind) - **The Trip of the Holy Week**
- Week 7:** (Palm Sunday) - **No lesson**
- Week 8:** (Resurrection Sunday) - **No Lesson**

Week 0 - The Vanity of the World - The book of Ecclesiastes

Meditation:

“A true philosopher is one whose intellect is conversant equally with ascetic practice and contemplative wisdom. Thus the perfect philosopher or lover of wisdom is one whose intellect has attained - alike on the moral, natural and theological levels - love of wisdom or, rather, love of God.

That is to say, he has learnt from God the principles of ascetic practice (moral philosophy), an insight into the spiritual causes of things (natural philosophy), and a precise contemplative understanding of doctrinal principles (theology).” St. Gregory of Sinai

Objective:

- ❖ To know the content and the theme behind the book of Ecclesiastes.
- ❖ To appreciate the wisdom that can be obtained from this book.

References:

- ❖ The Enigma of Ecclesiastes, by Carl Schultz, Ph.D.
- ❖ A paraphrase of the book of Ecclesiastes, by Gregory Thaumaturgus.
- ❖ A commentary on Ecclesiastes, by Bishop Gregory of Nyssa.
- ❖ The new open Bible – New King James

Memory Verses:

“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; A time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace” (Ecclesiastics 3:1-8).

Introduction:

Outline of the Book of Ecclesiastes:

- 1:1-11 - Introduction and illustration of Vanity
- 1:12- 2:26 - Proof of “All is Vanity” from experience
- 3:1- 6:12 - Proof of “All is Vanity” from observation
- 7:1 – 12:8 - The counsel for living with vanity
- 12:9-14 - Conclusion: “Fear God and Keep His Commandments”.

Lesson Outline:

Ecclesiastes is part of the wisdom of the Old Testament, which includes the Books of Job and Proverbs. In Hebrew called “Qoheleth”. The English name “The Preacher” is derived from a Greek term “Ekklesiastes”, roughly defined as “one who participates in or address an assembly.” Ecclesiastes was a roll that was read at the feast of Booths. The theme of the book is the vanity of mere earthly things contrasted to the knowledge and service of God.

The author of this book tells us that he is “The preacher, the son of David, King in Jerusalem.” This applies to King Solomon where verses (2:4-6) seem to describe him, “I made my works great, I build myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove.”

The Book consists of 12 chapters containing a series of reflections on the purpose and nature of life, where the prevalent sense of vanity is attributed to the absence of God as a purpose of our life.

Stated at the very beginning of the work, is “all is vanity” (1:2). Even if you pursue wisdom and enjoy your wealth, labor faithfully, deplore injustice and wickedness; the end is always the same, “vanity and a striving after wind” (4:4).

At the end verse (12:13-14), “the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil”.

The author praises wisdom as being profitable: “Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun” (7:11), yet writes of its lack of value (1:18). Of life in general, he supports both extremes by asserting that the dead are happier than the living and the unborn most fortunate of all (4:2-3), but then declares that life is preferable to death: “Anyone who is among the living has hope -- even a live dog is better off than a dead lion” (9:4).

One of the explanations of this contradiction is, “teaching by contrast or contradiction”. Here the author is trying to tell us that life is worthless without a growing faith in God to give a meaning to it.

Ecclesiastes has been called the most modern book of the Bible. Boredom, surfeit, disillusionment, and world’s weariness characterize our times as it did in the time it was written. Older certainties and values have crumbled now as in the life of King Solomon and new purposes to life are sought as then.

It has been also called by Short, “Ecclesiastes is the Bible’s night before Christmas.” Its purpose seems to be to raise the basic question of life, which only finds answers in Christ. While he correctly observes that there is nothing new under the sun (1:9) we as Christians affirm that through Christ there is newness, “A new commandment I give to you” (John 12:37). “If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:5).

The unsaved or natural man looks at life and says, “Death ends it all, eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” This is the way the unsaved man looks at life, and this is the picture that Solomon gives us in the Book of Ecclesiastes. In fact, the entire Book shows us how the unsaved man looks at life “under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:14), where this phrase “under the sun” appears 29 times. He has God remote from his human condition.

It is Ecclesiastes’ sharply critical attitude towards human conduct and the instability of earthly existence that has caught the attention of that great Cappadocian bishop, Gregory of Nyssa (c.335-395), who composed his own commentary on this book. The phrase “vanity of vanities” does not condemn creation but simply our misuse of what God had entrusted to our guardianship. As Bishop

Gregory says, the outcome of our misuse of the patrimony entrusted to us is the illusion that we are masters of ourselves and of the earth.

When a person begins to grow spiritually, he or she realizes that former ways of life and the world view resulting from them no longer suffice for a new manner of living which has come to birth. That is, what we once held dear is no longer considered to be so precious. The book of Ecclesiastes clearly provides expression for such a realization. It is concerned more with the fact that everything outside God consists of non-existence. God is absolute virtue, and the evil not belonging to Him consists of non-existence or the deprivation of goodness. It exists insofar as we freely chose to separate ourselves from this good (God). Bishop Gregory employs the vivid expression of “sewing” ourselves onto God which works against the “rending” tendency of sin.

The bishop of Nyssa in his commentary upon Ecclesiastes’ words, “A time to keep silence,” says that our human intelligence must remain in silent awe and adoration at the mystery of God’s transcendence.

The positive teachings of the book include that one should enjoy eating, drinking, and working for these activities are the simple pleasures and bases of human life, and although wisdom could not supply all the answers, the author continued to search for wisdom, where wisdom and fearing God was still the best way to approach life.

Conclusion:

Ecclesiastes is a captivating book, commanding great interest. It speaks to the modern age, as the climate out of which it grew is present with us today, so much that it has been called the most modern book of the bible. The questions, which the book raises, are the very questions we are raising. They are questions about meaning (1:3), monotony (1:10), destiny (3:21), justice (6:8), and the future (8:7).

The author chose to view the world from a natural perspective (“under the sun”), to meet his audience on its own ground – in order to show them the utter futility of a soulless and Godless world.

Modern man is also a man of sight, his conclusion about life being based upon what he can see with his own eyes! But he has become so dependent upon his eyes that he is trapped. He can only perceive that which is seen. Failing to see God and to detect his purposes, modern man becomes weary and even lost, concurring with Ecclesiastes’ finding -- *all is vanity*.

Week 1 - Monasticism

Objective:

- ❖ To get acquainted with the sublimity of monastic life.
- ❖ To know the indebtedness of the church and the world to monasticism.

Memory verse:

“If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (Matthew 19:21).

Introduction:

There are some objections held against Christian Monasticism:

- ❖ There is no reference to it in the Holy Bible and that it is derived from paganism and Jewish traditions.
- ❖ Monasticism is an escape from the world and its evil.
- ❖ It has no value to the Church or society.
- ❖ It is the refuge of the poor and ignorant who have not been able to get oriented to society.

Lesson Outline:

I. Monasticism Is A Biblical Call

Since early Christianity, a strong wave of enthusiasm for virginity and deprivation invaded believers. This led many husbands and wives to sublimate their bodies and live as brothers and sisters. Their role model was our Lord Jesus Christ who was born and baptized and lived as a virgin. He also placed his mother in the care of a virgin, St. John the Evangelist. If we study the biography of any great saint in monasticism, we find that his life was in accordance with Christ’s command: “If anyone thirst, let him come and drink.” For these travelers who have settled in the desert have found what they were looking for so they drank and were watered by the riches of divine love (Mark 10:29; 1 Corinthians 7:6.7). Consequently, out of their bodies flowed living waters.

II. What Does The Word Monk Denote?

In the Coptic language, the word “monakhos” denotes “a hermit’ who has isolated himself from people. He does so as he wishes to live in solitude without wife or children and keep away from society. Thus he would have enough time to grow spiritually and to consecrate all his time to the worship of God. In Arabic “Raheb” means “one who fears God”.

III. The Principles Of Christian Monasticism

A. Virginity (1 Corinthians 7:32-34)

This does not mean celibacy (unmarried state) because it is not merely the escape from marital obligations and children or a form of sexism. This is a positive virginity for it is the complete dedication to the service and worship of God in step with that of angels.

The virgin is some one whose concept of the family has become so comprehensive that he is no longer concerned with a wife and few children. Rather, he has consecrated himself to God to be in the service of the family in the full sense of the word, and to serve the whole human society. The verses of the apostle (Revelation 14:1-5) focus on virginity.

B. Asceticism and solitude (Luke 9:28; Hebrews 11:32-39)

The inclination to asceticism, which appeared in the Church, was inspired by the Lord's way of life. He used to spend His day teaching in the temple, and at night He went into the mountains (Luke 21:37). He spent forty days there before starting His ministry.

Ascetic fathers and saints have elaborated on the blessings of the life of a recluse. For as much as the deserts are wide and expansive, so are the dimensions of the soul, heart, and thought enabled to expand accordingly.

C. Voluntary poverty and deprivation (Luke 18:18-25)

This is illustrated by the story of the rich man. St. Paul warns us against money (1 Thessalonians 6:6-11). St. John the Tisbesse says: "We should attain a state in which we do not desire anything for ourselves other than the sole love of God." It is not true that monasticism is the way adopted by the poor who wish to evade the world and the burden of life. Indeed, many monks were renown for their wealth, such as Arsanius, Maximus, Anthony and others.

D. Obedience (Hebrews 5:8; Philippians 2:8)

Obedience to the will of God and as embodied in the spiritual law constitutes the safety net ensuring protection from sinning due to the leftist attacks (to disobey God's commands) or the rightwing attacks (through self justifications).

IV. Monasticism in Egypt

Monasticism in Egypt appeared and flourished before any other country due to the following:

A. Egypt's geographical nature

Egypt is formed of a narrow valley surrounded by deserts and dry plains and these inspire the rejection of the world.

B. The nature of Egyptians

The Egyptians are religiously inclined by nature. They love to meditate. This is true of the Pharaonic era, for though they were heathens, their culture was founded on the belief in immortality and the life to come.

C. Religious factor

In the fourth century, and with the end of the age of martyrdom, people found in monasticism the opportunity for asceticism, and the tolerance of difficulties in the depths of the wilderness. It was a chance for offering themselves a living sacrifice to God. This is a way of martyrdom without the shedding of blood.

D. Political and economical factor

Some Christians escaped and led a monastic life in the desert as a result of persecutions, as well as the monstrous taxes imposed on small farmers (mostly Christians).

V. The Most important orders of monasticism**A. The order of hermits**

Each lives in a cave alone, and follows a special personal system of prayer and fasting. Abba Paul the wanderer and Abba Anthony are among these.

B. The order of monastic groups

This order was founded by St. Antony. Groups of the dispersed caves formed a monastery without walls. The monks gather around one of the great fathers renowned for his spiritual nature.

C. The order of communal monasticism

Here groups of monks live together and observe a strict and severe order concerning the regulation of hours of wakefulness, sleep, prayers, food, and work. Each has duties and rights.

Applications:

- ❖ Study and contemplate the biographies of famous monks.
- ❖ Watch a film on the history of monasticism and a film on historical and present day monasteries.
- ❖ Go on excursions to visit monasteries and encourage spending days in retreat and solitude.
- ❖ Display the virtues of monasticism and asceticism in a positive way that would reveal their beauty.
- ❖ Conduct research to clarify the indebtedness of the Church and the world to monasticism.

Week 2 - Overview of the Pauline Epistles (I)

Meditation:

Lord Jesus, we pray that Your grace would work in us as abundantly as You allowed Him to work in the life of St. Paul. Give us wisdom as we try to live each epistle and understand the voice of Your Holy Spirit speaking through St. Paul to Your children.

Objective:

- ❖ To be familiar with the fourteen epistles attributed to St. Paul in the New Testament
- ❖ To understand the themes and the reasons for writing the different epistles.

Memory Verse:

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10).

References:

- ❖ The Bible. The fourteen epistles of St. Paul: Romans; Corinthians First and Second; Galatians; Ephesians; Philippians; Colossians; Thessalonians First and Second; Timothy First and Second; Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews.
- ❖ Introducing the New Testament - Joe Blair.
- ❖ Different explanation books for the epistles - Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty.

Introduction:

St. Paul's epistles make up over 50% of all the books of the New Testament. In each of his fourteen epistles, St. Paul addressed different problems that the different Churches were going through. In some of his epistles, he was defending the Gospel of Christ as well as his authority as an apostle called by God. Each of the fourteen epistles had different themes. The fourteen epistles of St. Paul are divided as follows along with their themes:

A. Eschatological Epistles

1. 1 Thessalonians: Life in the light of Christ's return.
2. 2 Thessalonians: Signs of Christ's return

B. Stereological (chief) Epistles

3. Romans: The righteousness of God through Christ for salvation
4. 1 Corinthians: The nature and unity of the Church in Christ
5. 2 Corinthians: Reconciliation through Christ
6. Galatians: Freedom in Christ (Galatians 5:1)

C. Prison Letters

7. Ephesians: The universal Church: People of God in Christ

8. Philippians: Joy in Christ
9. Colossians: Sufficiency of Christ
10. Philemon: In God, all are family

E. Pastoral Epistles

11. 1 Timothy: Affirmation of the truth in Christ
12. 2 Timothy: Faithfulness to Christ
13. Titus: Standards for serving Christ
14. Hebrews: Superiority of Christ over Judaism

Lesson Outline:

I. Romans

The Epistle to the Romans was written from Corinth around AD 55-57. It was not written to address specific problems within the Church there, but rather it was written as a treatise.

A. The purpose for writing Romans

- ❖ To guard the Church against the Judaism. The Judaism was a group of Jews who believed that Jesus Christ was a mere addition to the Law of Moses, and not a fulfillment of the Old Testament and a beginning for the New Testament.
- ❖ As a last will and testament.
- ❖ To get the Romans to support his planned mission to Spain.
- ❖ To replace a visit he might never make. St. Paul writes the Epistle to the Romans in case he is martyred in Jerusalem when he goes and gives the leaders of the Church there the offering, which he has collected from the Gentiles.

B. The theme for the Epistle to the Romans

It is stated in Romans 1:16,17. The righteousness of God is for salvation to those who believe in Christ Jesus. We are not attached to God on the basis of our righteousness, but we live in His righteousness. There is no basis for legalism. St. Paul also questions the Romans: how can we continue to sin if we have already died to sin?

II. First Corinthians

The first Epistle to the Corinthians was written from Ephesus around AD 55-56. The epistle was written to address many problems in the Church such as: factions and divisions, wisdom movement, ethical conduct (the incestuous relationship in Church), eating food sacrificed to idols, marriage and celibacy, women's participation in worship, participating in the Lord's Supper properly, spiritual gifts, and the issue of resurrection.

III. Second Corinthians

The second recorded Epistle to the Corinthians was sent by Titus.

A. The problems that led to the writing of 2 Corinthians

- ❖ Some outsiders entered the Church of Corinth and started preaching a kind of Judaism.
- ❖ Certain believers called themselves super apostles and used Moses as their only example.

- ❖ Super apostles turned the Corinthians against St. Paul saying that he was not impressive in appearance, speech, or word.
- ❖ St. Paul was accused of not having the Corinthians' credentials.
- ❖ St. Paul was accused of being without depth in spiritual experience.

In 2 Corinthians, St. Paul emphasized three theological themes. First, humans do not possess the power of God to manipulate it according to their will. Second, super apostles are according to the flesh (2 Corinthians 5:17). They view Christ out of the present evil age. Third, St. Paul knows that the Christians at Corinth are a new creation, and that they should only live their lives in Christ and of Christ, and not of themselves.

IV. Galatians

Many theologians are having difficulty determining which Galatia St. Paul was addressing when he first wrote the Epistle to the Galatians. There is a Northern Galatia (territorial) and a Southern Galatia (province). St. Paul criticizes the Judaizers for using the Old Testament as a sort of ritual prescription so that by keeping the ritual prescription they can come closer to God. Their good news was conditional. They considered themselves to be the gatekeepers to the gate of righteousness, and the key to the gate was the observances of the law including circumcision. St. Paul talks about justification by faith. The keynote in Galatians is 5:1, freedom in Christ. Through Christ, we have been freed from the tyranny of the law. Galatians 3:28 talks about the unity in Christ: freedom from any social or racial barriers. St. Paul also talks about the flesh that sets itself against God, and the Spirit that frees us through Jesus Christ.

V. First and Second Thessalonians

St. Paul wrote these two epistles around AD 50 from Corinth. They were delivered to the Thessalonians by Silas and Timothy. St. Paul went to Macedonia and preached in Thessalonica, which was the capital. Many God fearers were saved, while the proselytes were mad. St. Paul, Timothy and Silas had to flee to Athens. From Athens, St. Paul sent Timothy to the Church of Thessalonica with the epistles.

A. The problems that led to the writing of First Thessalonians

- ❖ Accusations against St. Paul.
- ❖ Conflicts concerning the Parousia (means being near or being by, and the word refers to the second coming of Christ).
 - a) What will happen to those who already died?
 - b) When will Christ return?

Second Thessalonians is not as elaborate and detailed as Thessalonians 1. St. Paul realized that some of the Thessalonians became idlers waiting for the Parousia (2 Thessalonians 3:11) so he had to tell them in the Second Thessalonians that certain signs had to be revealed first before the coming of Christ.

VI. Ephesians

Ephesians is referred to by many theologians as a "theological tract," "wisdom discourse," and "liturgical homily". Ephesians was a circular letter. St. Paul wrote this epistle to refute the dualistic

and Gnostic types of thinking that the Church was suffering from at that time. For that reason, St. Paul emphasized certain theologies in Ephesians such as:

- ❖ Christ is the One in whom God unites all things in heaven and on earth. He is the head of all things (1:22). His Body (Church) is cosmic in scale, composed of Jews and Gentiles, heavenly and earthly.
- ❖ Christ is the head of all things for His Church.
- ❖ Cosmic Christ is working a cosmic reconciliation. (Cosmic means universal and inclusive)

St. Paul also discussed many themes including the unity of Jews and Gentiles, the exalted Christ, the greatness of God, the apostle to the Gentiles, the status of the believers, and salvation in the present dimension.

One theologian suggested that the Epistle to the Ephesians was a cover letter to all the epistles that St. Paul had written.

VII. Philippians

Lydia is the first convert in Philippi. The Church of Philippi is the first Church formed in Europe. Lydia and her family provided a place for the converts to meet.

A. The two major difficulties that brought about the writing of this epistle

- ❖ Oppositions coming from non-Jewish communities.
- ❖ Conflict between Euodoia and Syntyche. The conflict could be something about leadership in the Church of Philippi (Philippians 4:2).

The keynote of Philippians is Joy. While in prison, the Philippians decided to bring a love offering to St. Paul by Epaphroditus, but Epaphroditus got sick and St. Paul had to take care of him instead. St. Paul praised Epaphroditus in his epistle just to show the Philippians that Epaphroditus did not fail in his mission to help him.

B. The reasons for writing this epistle

- ❖ To thank the Philippians for their love gift.
- ❖ To discuss Epaphroditus' situation with them.
- ❖ To address some potential problems primarily related to Euodia and Syntyche.

The Christ hymn in Chapter 2 has ample parallelism with John 13:3-17 (the washing of the feet)

Week 3 - Overview of the Pauline Epistles (II)

Objective:

- ❖ To be familiar with the fourteen epistles attributed to St. Paul in the New Testament.
- ❖ To understand the themes and the reasons for writing the different epistles.

Memory Verse:

“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season” (2 Timothy 4:2).

Lesson Outline:

I. Colossians

Epaphras started the Church in Colossi. The believers at Colossi were suffering from a heresy that was going around at the time. The heresy had three aspects:

- a) Jewish services (2:16),
- a) Pagan mythology and philosophy (2:8, 18), and
- b) Angelic worship (angels having power over people).

St. Paul wrote this epistle for two reasons: to deal with this heresy and to give insight about the Christian life. The general theme of the epistle is the sufficiency of Christ; “But Christ is all and in all” (3:11). This epistle was sent to the Colossians with Tychicus.

II. Philemon

This letter is addressed to Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus. Colossians and Philemon are said to have been written around the same time, and delivered by the same people. The letter to Philemon is also referred to as the Letter to Laodicea. In verse 1:8, St. Paul states the reason and purpose of the letter “Therefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting”. Some think that Archippus is the slave owner and that Philemon is the pastor of the Church. Later in AD 110, it is recorded that there was a bishop named Onesimus. Some think that this is the same Onesimus, the runaway slave.

III. First Timothy

St. Paul wrote this epistle from Macedonia to Timothy in Ephesus. Timothy was facing several difficulties because of a false doctrine that was turning people away from Church.

A. Characteristics of this false doctrine

- a) It involved myths and genealogies (1:4 and 4:7).
- b) It taught the law without understanding (1:7).
- c) They advocated asceticism in the form of marriage and the taking of certain food.
- d) They emphasized their own brand of knowledge (6:20).
- e) It had elements of Judaism and Gnosticism.

St. Paul wrote to Timothy encouraging him to be faithful in his ministry, to stay away from false doctrine, and to give instructions concerning Church organization and practice.

IV. Second Timothy

St. Paul wrote it while he was in prison in Rome to Timothy in Ephesus. St. Paul was about to meet his death (4:6). For that reason, he wrote this letter to give final instructions to Timothy:

- a) To endure the difficulties.
- b) To be faithful.
- c) To fulfill his duties in enduring with the Gospel.
- d) To remind him that God gives us a Spirit of power and not of fear.
- e) To admonish him and give him a charge to teach and practice correctly.
- f) To encourage him to “exhort, convince, rebuke”(4:2).

The four things that St. Paul asked of Timothy as St. Paul approached death were:

- 1) Friends, 2) Cloak, 3) Books, 4) Parchments (4:2)

In this epistle, St. Paul mentioned so many people whom we have never met anywhere else in the Bible.

V. Titus

St. Paul wrote this epistle from Macedonia to Titus in Crete. Titus was also facing several difficulties just like Timothy. The heresy that was attacking the Church in Crete dealt with circumcision, Jewish myth, and the observances of the law. Verse 12 in Chapter 3 talks about a meeting that St. Paul had planned with Titus. No one knows if this meeting ever took place. Some theologians believe that St. Paul wrote the Epistle to Titus before he wrote Second Timothy. It is said that Titus became a Christian because of St. Paul’s testimony.

VI. Hebrews

Many Jewish believers, having stepped out of Judaism into Christianity, want to reverse their course in order to escape persecution by their countrymen. St. Paul exhorts the Hebrews to “*go to perfection*” (6:1). His appeal is based on the superiority of Christ over the Judaic system. Christ is better than the angels, for they worship Him. He is better than Moses, for He created him. He is better than the Aaronic priesthood, for His sacrifice was once for all time. He is better than the law, for He mediates a better covenant. In short, there is more to be gained in Christ than to be lost in Judaism. Pressing on in Christ produces tested faith, self-discipline, and a visible love seen in good works. The Epistle to the Hebrews seems to be written before 70 AD.

Conclusion:

It is of more benefit to learn about each epistle before studying the epistle. Learning about the time, the occasion, the purpose, the difficulties that the Churches were facing, will help us to have a better understanding of what St. Paul said and why.

Applications:

- ❖ It might be more efficient if everyone in the Sunday school class gets a copy of the lesson so that they may use it as they study the different epistles of St. Paul later on.

Week 4 - My Need for Jesus Christ

Meditation:

Shepherd of our souls, we are lost without You. Help us to rejoice in Your presence that we do not think of straying. Thank You for Your love that find us and holds us unto You.

Objective:

There is no life without Jesus Christ.

Memory Verses:

“Mary has chosen that good part” (Luke 10:42).

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21).

Introduction:

I. Limited Yet Unsuitable

Within man there is *a need* that is endless and unsuitable. All philosophical and psychological studies have identified that need. Moreover, the daily observation of man’s life has proved its existence.

For example, man may seek knowledge and he may attain various scientific degrees, however, he is still unsatisfied and demands more.

Another may seek the truth, and the truth is God, so he struggles in his search. However, he does not reach the other bank for the simple reason that he is limited. At the same time, there is within him an infinite hunger that can be satisfied by God only. This need will not be satisfied except in the world to come, when man shakes off the finiteness of his flesh and short sightedness and puts on another nature granted by God. Then the words of the apostle will be fulfilled: “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

Similarly, man may struggle in his search for money. He may obtain a lot of it. However, he continues his relentless pursuit. This is because money is limited and no matter how plentiful it is, money can never satisfy that infinite hunger within man.

The same theory applies to earthly pleasures. Man may strive and seek them, he may greedily indulge in them every day, yet he is never satisfied. Actually, these pleasures are like salty water, which does not quench thirst, but rather inflames it.

This reveals the truth of the saying, “man’s heart is a triangle, and even if we put inside it the whole globe, the angles will still be empty”. For there is nothing that can satisfy the triangle of man’s heart other than the unity in One God.

A philosopher known as Baggy said, “Man is a deep well of desires, and a well can never be filled. No matter how much water is poured into it, it will never be filled”. Now, let us ask ourselves: what are my real needs? How can I satisfy them?

Lesson Outline:

Man's deepest needs can be grouped into two categories:

- a) **Psychological needs:** Such as the need for love, success and security.
- b) **Spiritual needs:** Such as forgiveness, inner peace and immortality.
- c) Jesus Christ can only fulfill all these needs.

I. The Need For Love

This is a real need present in man's inner depths. Without love, man lives within his shell, isolated from the flow of human life. He is wrapped within himself and deprived of communal life. However, human love is limited, and is often diverted. In fact, it is a love that likes to take before it gives. Consequently, it is not satisfying and soon becomes transformed into hatred. On the other hand, if we obtain infinite spiritual love that proceeds from the heart of God, we will be satisfied. Moreover, we will offer it to others without any hindrance, reservation, or diversion. It will take the form of a holy, generous, and communal quality that is self-sacrificial.

II. The Need For Success

The definition of success varies from one person to another. However, real success is to "*prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers*" (3 John 2). This important form of success is a gift of God only. It protects the soul from harm and grants it true peace. This is what truly makes man successful in all the walks of life, and not only in one limited sphere as that of money or knowledge.

III. The Need For Security

Man may live in a fortified fortress but still experience fear from people or the unknown future. Our children, however, experience real security for they are supported by God's promise "Fear not, for I am with you". Thus they are saved from the torment of fear. Moreover, they speak out of perfect love that casts out fear (1 John 4:18).

IV. The Need For Forgiveness

"For there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). For Jesus Christ alone is the redeemer and "through His blood, the forgiveness of sins" (Ephesians 1:7). He is the only offering that can adequately cover our sins. This gift cannot be granted by anyone else other than Jesus Christ. Man obtains it through repentance, baptism, and Holy Communion.

V. The Need For Immortality

It is impossible for man to be satisfied by the world or by time for he will always transcend these and aspire to an encompassing immortality and happy eternity with God. Such eternal life is confined in the person of Jesus Christ for "*this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have Sent*" (John 17:3).

Applications:

- ❖ Train yourself to love, start with your fellow brothers and extend that to include the love of enemies.

- ❖ Train yourself to go into retreat so that your soul is at peace and can meet Jesus Christ even for one hour on a weekly basis.
- ❖ Go regularly to confession to obtain absolution and forgiveness and to solve your problems.
- ❖ “Turn your soul to God and you will find peace” St. Abba Moussa.

Week 5 - The Redeeming Suffering of Our Lord Jesus Christ

Objective:

- ❖ That we may know Him and the power of His resurrection and share His suffering.

Memory verse:

“I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Philippians 3:10).

Introduction:

Our Lord raised the value of suffering through His Holy suffering. Through Him, suffering has come to convey the most sublime feelings that mankind express towards God and people.

Lesson Outline:

Many godly and saintly people in the Old Testament have spoken symbolically about the suffering of the Lord Jesus Christ. These have referred to all that happened to Jesus Christ during His incarnate existence on earth. They spoke about His suffering with strong yearning, for they would cure all humanity of its sins, pains, and its iniquities.

Isaiah prophesied concerning Him and said, “But He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we were healed” (Isaiah 53:5).

St. Peter confirms this fact by saying, “who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we having died to sins, might live for righteousness - by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Peter 2:24).

“Stripes” refer to Christ’s sufferings. In the fraction prayer recited on Holy Saturday, we address Our Lord and say: “You have been wounded for our sins and suffered for our iniquities. The edification of our peace is upon You, and by Your wounds we have been healed. We were all like lost sheep and You have come and saved us through the knowledge of Your Cross.”

Our Lord Jesus Christ bore many wounds and sufferings in order to save us and rescue us out of slavery to Satan. He has killed our sins on the Cross, by nailing them, and making us worthy of eternal life. That is why we call the wounds and sufferings of Christ “the healing and life-giving sufferings”.

Our Lord’s pains are an indication of His love for mankind: It is on account of His love that He was crucified. Without that love, neither Pilate nor the Jews could have crucified Him. He bore suffering joyously as He found happiness in the great redeeming task He performed.

Christ’s sufferings were not merely physical ones: whether they were thorns, floggings, slaps, carrying the cross, or the crucifixion. He endured all forms of physical pain arising from poverty, asceticism, hunger, traveling, slaps, floggings and then crucifixion.

Christ suffered psychologically too. He passed through rejection and abandonment, treachery, humiliation, and conspiracy. While He is the Holy One in whose mouth there was no deception. The psalmist prophesied concerning Him and said, “My sorrow is continually before me” (Psalm 38:17).

Also “The pain of death encompasses me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me. I found trouble and sorrow” (Psalm 116:3).

Christ’s words were internal as well as external. He has spoken about the internal psychological pain when He was in the garden of Gethsemane: “My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death” (Matthew 26:38). By understanding the psychological pain our Lord wished to console grieving hearts and give them peace for He is the source of all peace.

Christ also underwent spiritual suffering: His spirit suffered while He is the Holy One without blemish who carried our sins for our sake “We like sheep have gone astray; we have turned. Everyone, to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 56:6).

“Your Spirit, O Lord, has borne the iniquities of endless generations in the past and in the future, and the sins of all mankind.”

Christ was overwhelmed, moreover, with pain at the deception and erring of mankind and wept over Jerusalem that was taken up by merry-making and revelry.

Meditation on suffering raises the soul to sublime levels that is where Christ was crucified and where He lifts up the soul above the level of matter or knowledge. Thus, in times of suffering, man is in a deeper and stronger spiritual condition. Because pain is beneficial for the spirit, God allows it, which is if man endures it wisely.

The road of pain is the only scope where man is schooled to learn obedience. St. Paul accordingly, writes about the Savior: “though He was Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered” (Hebrews 5:8).

Conclusion:

What was shameful became honorable; what was humiliation became glorious; what was weakness became strength and salvation. That is what Christ’s Cross has achieved.

Sayings of the Fathers:

“O, how past understanding is God’s wisdom... the wicked sins, yet the honorable is punished; the compulsive is wounded, yet the good is judged; and whatever the hypocritical commits, the righteous has to bear!” (St. Augustine).

Applications:

- ❖ Can we bear the sins of others just as Christ has done? Or do we stop and fuss over every mistake committed by others?
- ❖ Have you experienced sharing the sufferings of Christ?

Week 6 - The Trip of the Holy Week

Meditation:

May these days of the holy Pascha be filled with prayers, fasting and unity with the Lord in His suffering for our sake.

Objective:

- ❖ To prepare the students to understand and follow closely the events of the holy week.
- ❖ To learn the order of every hour of prayer during the Pascha days.

Memory Verse:

“You were bought at a price” (1 Corinthians 7:23).

References:

- ❖ The trip from Jerusalem to Golgotha - Fr. Bishoy Kamel
- ❖ The rite of the Holy Week - Pascha book

Introduction:

This is the most Holy Week of the whole year. In the early days Christians used to completely free themselves from anything except prayer, fasting and reading the Bible during this week. They followed the way of suffering that our Lord had to go through for our sake.

Lesson Outline:

I. Pascha

The word Pascha means Passover. As the Israelites were saved from the slavery in Egypt by the blood of the Passover lamb on their doors, the blood of Jesus Christ has saved us from Satan's slavery. During this week, we pass through the suffering of our Lord to the Paradise on the Apocalypse night.

II. Pascha Prayers

Not all of the Agpeya prayers are related to the suffering of our Lord; for example, the third hour is related to the descent of the Holy Spirit as tongues of fire on the apostles. Therefore, during the Holy week, we do not pray the Agpeya prayers, for the church would like to concentrate only on the sufferings of our Lord during this week. Instead, we pray the Pascha hours of prayers, which are specially arranged according to the events of the holy week day by day. At the evening of each day during the Holy week we read the next day prayers, since each day starts from the evening of the day before, i.e. on Sunday night we pray the hours of Monday eve. Every Pascha has first, third, sixth, ninth and eleventh hours of prayer. Only the great Friday has an additional twelfth hour. Each hour of prayer consists of:

A. Prophecies from the Old Testament**B. Doxology of the Pascha**

“Thine is the power, the glory and the majesty....” (Revelation 4:9,5:12-13; 7:12). It is repeated 12 times in each prayer to replace the psalms in the Agpeya prayers.

C. Psalm**D. Gospel****E. Exposition**

At the end of every Pascha we pray the litanies and the conclusion.

III. Pre-Pascha Events

Jesus was gaining great popularity after raising Lazarus from the dead and His great entrance to Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. This triggered the authorities to plot His death.

IV. Pascha Events

The Eve of Sunday: Fragrant oil poured on His feet in Bethany. The smell of the oil has filled the whole place and expressed the love of Mary, the sister of Lazarus, towards our Lord. This was the start of the path of suffering during this Passion Week.

Sunday Morning: The great entrance to Jerusalem with a warm welcome. His entrance was to start a heavenly kingdom in the hearts of those who are ready to accept Him, even when He appears weak on the cross.

The Eve of Monday: The way towards Golgotha starts with prayer to strengthen the faith of his disciples in Him.

Monday Morning and the Eve of Tuesday: The Lord Leaves the house of Mary, Martha and Lazarus in Bethany and goes to the temple to teach. On His way, He cursed the fig tree, which had many leaves but no fruits. When He entered the temple he turned the table of the sellers indicating that the house of the Lord is a house of prayers.

Tuesday Morning and the Eve of Wednesday : On His way He passed again by the fig tree and it had withered. This was to strengthen the faith of the disciples. Then, He spent the rest of the day in the temple discussing matters with the Pharisees and Sadducees. Jesus Christ had answered them with many parables about the second coming and the heavenly Jerusalem. In the last our of Tuesday eve, the priests and the Jewish authorities planed His capture.

Wednesday Morning and the Eve of Thursday: After Jesus returned from the temple, He did not want to go back.

- ❖ A woman pours oil on His head.
- ❖ Judas agrees to deliver Jesus to the chief priests for 30 pieces of silver. On this evening, the church arranged the congregation refrain from kissing as a greeting since it is the symbol of Judas betrayal kiss.

Thursday Morning and the Eve of Friday : The disciples prepared for the Passover, and then they gathered together in the house of St. Mark to eat the Passover. Our Lord also washed the feet of His disciples on this day to teach them to serve and to humble themselves.

On this Day also, Jesus Christ told Peter that he will deny Him three times.

Finally, He entered Gethsemane to pray and the angel appeared to Him to strengthen Him. Judas came with the soldiers and surrendered Him to the authorities.

Good Friday: The trial, the suffering, the crucifixion and the death of our Lord on the cross.

Applications:

- ❖ Attend as many of the Pascha prayers during this week to stoke on the spirituality of this week and live with our Lord His sufferings.

LESSONS FOR THE PENTECOST PERIOD
(Fifty days after Resurrection)

Week 1: The Resurrection and the Divinity of Christ

Week 2: The First Epistle of St. John (Part I)

Week 3: The First Epistle of St. John (Part II)

Week 4: Judge Not Others

Week 5: The Church Feasts

Week 6: The Book of Acts

Week 7: (The Feast of Pentecost) - The Pentecost in Our Lives as Young Adults.

Week 1 - The Resurrection and the Divinity of Christ

Objective:

- ❖ The Resurrection of Christ is proof of His divinity, and His power to save those who believe in Him.

Memory verse:

“For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection” (Romans 6:5)

Lesson Outline:

God’s plan for salvation was put into effect from the moment His only Son was incarnate. He became flesh in order to bless our nature and renew our being by His life and holiness. He intended to suffer death on our behalf and ascended, for He is the Lord of life. Through His resurrection, we have been granted resurrection. Now, God invites believers to open their hearts so that He may renew the divine power of His resurrection.

I. How God Introduces All The Effects Of His Resurrection Into Our Life?

- ❖ A great earthquake: A great earthquake occurred (Matthew 28:2) at dawn on the day of His resurrection. This announces the wonderful power contained in the resurrection of our Lord. This earthquake shook the gates and stronghold of the tomb. It also shakes the heart in order to roll away the evil hurdles and tribulations that suffocate it. Every repentant feels the power of the resurrected Christ shake his being and uproot evil as he offers repentance. This power produces a new living person who shakes off the pangs of death (death due to sin). Throughout his life, the repentant will experience the uplifting impact of this Power that will constantly raise him from every failing and protect him at every turning point.
- ❖ The seal: Christ, our Lord, arose and the sealing stone remained on the tomb. He entered into the disciples meeting place though the doors were locked. He is the God of Glory who challenges all earthly powers, obstacles, and chains. This is a confirmation of the Lord’s divinity. Every Christian feels that by the power of the Risen Lord, which has been granted to him, he is enabled to overcome all obstacles and hurdles. Indeed, whatever is mentally or logically impossible can be overcome since the Lord has granted us faith, through which we are raised to the level of heavenly life. In spite of the plots of the Jews and the seals of the Romans, Christ rose. In the same way He resurrects His children from death caused by their own sins and their apathy. He strengthens them to oppose the strong evil currents and deceptive temptations. Through such power, St. Athanasius challenged the heretics of the world around him vis-à-vis his steadfastness concerning true evangelical faith, which teaches the glory and deity of Christ the Son of God. Moreover, such power inspired a crow to serve Abba Paul in the wilderness, thus transforming its nature from being a snatcher of food to a supplier of it.
- ❖ Resurrecting Himself: It is important to note that the miracles wrought to resurrect the dead have recurred by the power of the Lord and through some prophets and apostles throughout the different ages. However, our Lord rose alone without anyone helping Him to do so. This is

because He arose by the power of His divinity that has vanquished death thus, underlining His deity, inborn power and self-sufficiency. All these overflow and satiate His people.

- ❖ Conquer death: When the Jews heard the words of Christ concerning divine matters and everlasting life; some of them suspected that these were pure imaginations “For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coining of our Lord Jesus Christ but were eyewitnesses of His majesty” (2 Peter 1:16). Also, “To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death” (Luke 1:79). Thus the Lord arose and conquered the pains of death. He released the saints who had died and rested in the hope that He will come and rise and take them to His heavenly kingdom and eternal paradise Ephesians
- ❖ Eternal Resurrection: We say that Christ became the herald of those fallen asleep denoting that His is an eternal resurrection. All those who have gone through the miracle of resurrection (like Lazarus) have died again. Jesus Christ, however, died only once, “the all-righteous on behalf of sinners”, and thereby opened the door of life and brought in the souls of believers: “today, you will be with me in Paradise.” He also called saying, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25). In the book of Revelation, the apostle speaks about those who have been granted the first resurrection through Jesus Christ “Over such the second death has no power.” This explains why all those who have surrendered themselves into God’s hands should be confident that no one, whoever he may be can snatch them (John 10:28) or deprive them of this protection as long as they are steadfast in faith and believe in the Savior, and in their spiritual struggle.
- ❖ Eternal life: The Lord arose in His glorified body. This is not fictitious; He said: “Feel Me”, yet it was an extra ordinary glorious resurrection (for He entered while the doors were closed). This is not only a clear indication of Christ’s divinity but it is a definite guarantee of the glory of His kingdom and a true proof of the reality of eternal life which the Lord promised to His children “Where I am, there will you be also”. A person who has tasted the effects of the resurrection in his life, is reassured of the hope in the resurrection of the dead and the eternal life to come and prays to God to present this hope in him. In fact, God has given evidence of the life to come which involves no decay, to his saints, for the bodies of some of them gave out light while they were still alive, (for example: Pope Shenouda, the head of hermits, Maximus and Domadius). God has also preserved the bodies of some others that remain without decay (like Abba Bishoy). On account of all that, believers remain steadfast against the torrent of evil and tribulation in the world, the lusts and egoism of the self, while holding onto hope and being joyful in spite of the stress of this life. Their strong faith is the best testimony to the truth of the Lord’s resurrection before any opponents.

Applications:

- ❖ Experience repentance and the power of the Lord’s resurrection as you reject sin or an evil habit dominating you. By God’s power and perseverance in prayer and surrendering your will, all is possible.
- ❖ Experience the joy of the resurrection in the middle of difficulties and dilemmas of life.

Week 2 - The First Epistle of St. John (Part I)

Objective:

- ❖ To get acquainted with the epistle and its writer.

Memory verse:

“We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death” (1 John 3:14).

Introduction:

I. The Writer of the Epistle

- ❖ He is John, the son of Zebedee, from Bethesda in Galilee. Although his name is not mentioned in this epistle, it has been attributed to him due to the similarity between its contents and those of the Gospel in his name, because he speaks in both about:
 - a. The eternal Word (1 John 1:1,2).
 - b. The Incarnate Word that grants life to believers (1 John 1:14; 1 John 10:10; 1 John 4:2.9).
 - c. Faith that transfers the Christian from death into life (1 John 5:45; 1 John 3:14).
 - d. Love being the most important feature of a believer (1 John 3:34,35; 1 John 2:11).
- ❖ He is the brother of James, and his mother is Salome (the cousin of the Virgin Mary). His father was a fisherman.
- ❖ He is the writer of the Gospel according to John, the three Epistles and the Book of Revelation.
- ❖ He is the only one who did not die as a martyr, yet he underwent a lot of torture. He passed away at the beginning of the second century at the age of ninety-eight.
- ❖ He preached the Word in Asia Minor and was banished to the Isle of Patmos.

II. To Whom Did He Write This Epistle?

He wrote it to believers, originally Gentiles, who had come into the faith. He aimed at preserving and warning them against idols (1 John 5:21).

III. Why Was It Written?

Heretical teachings appeared and were spread by false teachers:

- ❖ Dualism: They believed that there are two gods; a good god who created the spirit and an evil god who created matter like the flesh.
- ❖ Gnosticism: They imagined that they could attain salvation through knowledge only.

IV. What Is The Goal Of Writing This Epistle?

- ❖ So that our joy may be complete (1 John 1:4).
- ❖ That we may keep away from sin (1 John 2:1).

- ❖ To avoid deceivers (1 John 2:26).
- ❖ To know that life is eternal (1 John 5:13,14).

V. Subjects Dealt With In The Epistle And Corresponding References

Chapter One: The effect of the belief in the incarnation in our lives.

Chapter Two: Fellowship with God and with our fellow brothers.

Chapter Three: The blessing of adoption we have been granted and the obligations associated with it.

Chapter Four: Love within a framework of truth and wisdom.

Chapter Five: The effect of Baptism upon us and our capacity to believe in Christ our Lord

Lesson Outline:

I. Chapter One

A. Purpose

To clarify the vital value of the belief in the incarnation.

II. Main Points

A. The reality of the Incarnation of the Word, the Giver of Life (Chapter One and Two).

- ❖ The body that Christ took on was a real body (1 John 1:1).
- ❖ The body He took from the holy Virgin is God, the Word “the life was manifested”.
- ❖ The incarnation provided the opportunity for man to get intimately close to God and to know Him fully.

B. What we first get to know about our fellowship with Christ. He is Light, and the characteristics of light are:

- ❖ Clarity: So that all those who share fellowship with Him are lucid and clear in their faith.
- ❖ Uprightness: For in God there is no change or circumvention.
- ❖ Darkness cannot be overpowering: It cannot overcome the light, for light shines in the darkness and is unaffected.

C. Signs of fellowship with Christ

- ❖ Walking in the light (Romans 13:12).
- ❖ Humility: If we say we do not sin, we deceive ourselves.
- ❖ Continuous repentance: If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just.

Applications:

A. Quote the verses that underline the following meanings, basing your answers upon your study of chapter one:

- ❖ The goal of the incarnation is to grant us fellowship and enjoyment of the true life.
- ❖ The goal of the incarnation is to allow us to follow the Light and walk in it.
- ❖ The confession of sin is a Christian obligation.

B. Based on the Gospel and the Epistles of John, explain what is meant by the following:

- ❖ The Word; The Life; The Love; The Joy; The Light.
- ❖ Can you quote verses that relate several of these together?

C. Practice the mystery of confession fearlessly and shamelessly, so that you may live in the light.

D. Practice walking in the light and do not act in the darkness.

Week 3 - The First Epistle of John (Part II)

Objective:

- ❖ The study of chapters two and three and the clarification of our fellowship with God

Memory verse:

“Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God” (1 John 3:9).

Lesson Outline:

I. Chapter Two: What are the features revealing our fellowship with God?

A. Not committing sin (1 John 2:1,2)

This is the aim of everyone... and if we sin, we have an “Advocate” with the Father.

B. Keeping the commandments (1 John 2:3-11)

This is the proof of our love to Him because they speak of Him. Finding the commandments difficult arises from lack of inner love.

C. Rejecting the love of the world (1 John 2:12-17)

God has granted us the power to reject the love of the world (1 John 2:12-14). Furthermore, it is impossible to love the world and God at the same time (Matthew 6:24).

D. Rejecting apostasy and those separated from the Church (John 2:18-23)

There will surely be confusion and Christ has warned us about that (Matthew 24:5,24-28). Moreover, we will not be shaken since we will remain steadfast in the Lord. Nevertheless we should avoid deceivers, such as Antichrists (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

E. Steadfastness in God (1 John 2:24-27)

- ❖ Steadfastness in Love (John 8:31).
- ❖ Steadfastness in faith that is a recommendation delivered by all the apostles to us (1 Corinthians 16:13, 2Thes 3:14; 2 Peter 3:17). The Lord has promised to bless our efforts (John 15:17; 2 Corinthians 1:21-23; Revelation 2:8-25).
- ❖ The Reward: All who follow in the Lord’s footsteps walk in righteousness.

II. Chapter Three

A. The gift of adoption

There are two spiritual families in the world. One belongs to Satan and one belongs to the Lord. We belong to the Lord’s spiritual family (Galatians 3:26). We are heirs regardless of our condition.

B. Our responsibility as children of God (Jeremiah1 John 3:3-18)

- ❖ Purity, having become the children of God, it is our task to purify ourselves.
- ❖ Holiness, whoever is born of God, does not sin, (1 John 1:8-10;1 John 2:9-11).

- ❖ Love (1 John 3:10-18). This is a positive value not that we should not sin but that we show love to our fellow brothers (1 John 3:10-14).
- ❖ How to preserve the status of the children of God - adoption (1 John 3:19).
- ❖ We have to reckon with ourselves. If our heart condemns us, this means our inner life and motives in doing charity are incorrect. God is greater than our heart. Therefore, we admit our sins and weaknesses. If our heart does not condemn us and we find that we bear true love, then we have confidence in God (1 John 3:19-22).
- ❖ Steadfastness in faith (1 John 3:23). This takes place by keeping the commandments of God.

III. Chapter Four

A. Love and Wisdom (1 John 4:1-6)

- ❖ Love means that we should follow the spirit and its teachings. But what is the true spirit? It is every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. On the other hand, an evil spirit manifests itself in rejecting faith in Christ's incarnation, defying the rites and teachings of the church.

B. The spirit of truth and the spirit of evil

i) The spirit of truth

- ❖ Proceeds from God, therefore it confesses and recognizes the incarnate Lord.
- ❖ Its characteristic feature is love for it proceeds from God.
- ❖ He is the greatest, "because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world".

ii) The spirit of evil

- ❖ Is antichrist and does not love the truth.
- ❖ It is of the world; hence the world listens to it.
- ❖ It does not love, because it does not know God.

C. God's love for us (1 John 4:7-10)

- ❖ The only religion that speaks about God's love for mankind is Christianity (1 John 4:8).
- ❖ God's love for us is eternal for He has sent His Son, "that we might live through Him." That is true, for even when we sin, we remain His children, and can ask Him for all our needs (Romans 8:32).

D. How can we enjoy the taste of His love (1 John 4:11-21)

i) Through brotherly love (1 John 4:11-20)

- ❖ If any spirit of hatred towards any one is stirred within us, or any spirit of revenge, or enmity, or jealousy is awakened, then He is able to burn all the thorns that suffocate the soul by His fiery power; but only if we pray to Him to do so.
- ❖ The sign of steadfastness in the Lord is love towards our fellow brothers (1 John 4:16.20.21).

ii) Through watching for the coming of the Lord with joy (1 John 4:17,18)

- ❖ For perfect love is found in heaven (1 John 4:17). As we taste God's love while we are here on earth, and as we interact with Him, we wait anxiously and confidently for the day of the Lord (1 Corinthians 13:8-13).

E. There is no fear in love (1 John 4:18)

- ❖ As much as love increases fear decreases. Yet there is fear of another kind that accompanies love, the fear inspired by awe and respect, the fear experienced by a person who does not wish to hurt a loved one, the fear to be separated from God.
- ❖ St. Felix says, “there is one who fears to be flogged and that is the fear experienced by a slave; there is one who fears to lose, a fear experienced by an employee. While there is one who fears to provoke his loved one and such fear is experienced by the righteous”.

IV. Chapter Five**A. Adoption by God is the fruit of believing in Him**

- ❖ In the early Church, candidates for baptism were gradually promoted into the lines of the catechumen. In the present baptism rituals it is necessary to recite the Creed of the Faith before the dipping into the water.

B. The fruit of baptism (1 John 5:2-5,14-18)

- ❖ Love towards our fellow brothers whom we see, and love for the saints (1 John 5:2).
- ❖ Keeping the commandments (1 John 5:2,3).
- ❖ Confidence in our prayers being answered and as long as we pray for things that are according to His Will (1 John 5:14,15).
- ❖ Baptism is founded on the Cross and accepting it means accepting to being buried and resurrecting with the Lord.
- ❖ The heavens testify to the power of baptism as the Holy Trinity appeared at the time of Christ’s baptism.

C. A final recommendation (1 John 5:21)

- ❖ The apostle reiterates that we are God’s children therefore we surrender to Him.
- ❖ We should surrender our hearts to God, for there are so many idols: money, greed, lust, honor, egoism, etc.

Applications:**I. Chapter Two**

- ❖ Indicate the practical ways of demonstrating our love to God; who loved us and laid down his life for us.
- ❖ Love within the framework of truth. Explain how our love for God makes us reject heresy.
- ❖ What is the relationship between our love for God and our love for men? Support your view by verses from this chapter.
- ❖ What is meant by righteousness? How can we practice righteousness?
- ❖ What is meant by “Do not love the world”? How is it related to the verse: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that none who believe in Him is condemned?”

II. Chapter Three

- ❖ The apostle distinguishes between two spiritual families in the world, what are they? What are their characteristic features?
- ❖ What is the greatest honor bestowed upon you by God? How can you preserve it? What is your attitude towards the world that does not appreciate that honor?
- ❖ How can you answer those sects that claim that a true believer never sins? To assist you, refer to the following verses: 1 Corinthians 10:2; 2 Corinthians 12:17; 2 Corinthians 11:2; 1 Corinthians 9:27.

III. Which Verses In Chapter Four Reinforces The Following Christian Principles

- ❖ Love implies our rejection of all that opposes the spirit of God, love expressed through the truth.
- ❖ The source of true love is the cross.
- ❖ We get a taste of love through our experience of it towards our fellow brothers and through our vigil for the day of the Lord.
- ❖ What is meant by: There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear? What is the difference between fear and being stricken within the framework of our love for God?
- ❖ Attempt to learn by heart the verses concerned with brotherly love, and to apply them in your practical life. This would involve daily and continual practice.

Week 4 - Judge Not Others

Objective:

- ❖ To understand the difference between judging people and judging events.
- ❖ To refrain from the sin of judging others.

Memory Verse:

“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make, you will be judged” (Matthew 7:1).

References:

- ❖ “Do not Judge” by Pope Shenouda III
- ❖ “Paradise of the spirit” Part 1, Bishop Youanis, Chapter 8

Introduction:

- ❖ The sin of judging others is dangerous because many do not feel they are committing that sin. It is a sin that robs God of His right in Judgment.
- ❖ To what extent should we understand the commandment of not judging others?
- ❖ Can we judge actions and not judge others?

Lesson Outline:

I. Types Of Judgment Against Others

A. Judging by the mind

This might be a spiritual way for the thoughts to become a mere screen showing whatever wrong feelings and dreadful thoughts found in the heart.

B. Judging by the tongue

It has various kinds among which are:

- a) **Backbiting:** speaking in the absence of someone. It is harmful because the person who is insulted in secret has no chance to defend himself because he does not know about the matter.
- b) **Slander:** is defaming others, revealing their faults or ascribing faults to them. It is a disease spread among many whenever they find nothing useful to speak about, they make of the peoples' bad news a favorite material of their talk.
- c) **Condemnation:** which means judging a person as guilty. There is a difference between partial condemnation and whole condemnation. For example, there is a difference between saying that someone is a liar in a certain situation and saying that he is a liar. There is still a difference between condemning one individual and condemning a group. Among the examples of general condemnation is the condemnation of the Gentiles by the Jews.

C. Judging by printed material and cassette recording

Judging may be through printed material published and distributed in thousands of copies or through a book or a pamphlet.

D. Judging by hearing

The fathers say that the listener is a partner with the speaker as he gives him the chance to speak and say what he wants.

St. Isaiah said: "If you hear one of the brothers condemning another, do not be ashamed to reject what he says fearing that God may be angry, and try to avoid hearing by any suitable way. Do not allow yourself to hear about the sins of your brother or condemn him."

St. Evagrius said: "Close your ears against what people say against others lest you should have sinned like them and got used to evil purposes."

E. Other kinds of judging others

It happens through cornering others and exposing them as you may not say to a person that he is fool but may address to him particular question knowing in advance that he will not be able to answer them or that they are above his intellectual level. In this way, you are putting such a person in a critical situation revealing his ignorance in front of others.

F. Judging others may extend to involve disgracing or taunting

It is another kind of condemnation connected with other sins and going so deep that it might be more dangerous than other kinds with regard to the feelings.

II. Judging Others Is A Compound Sin**A. Taking the role of God**

The person who judges the other is -in fact- giving himself God's rights and powers, and is acting beyond his power.

B. An offence to him who judges others

Through judging others, one falls under judgment as the Lord says, "Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged, and with the same measure you use it will be measured back to you" (Matthew 7:1-2).

C. A sin against the offended

In judging another person we talk about his sins, without giving him opportunity to defend himself. Suppose that such a person has actually sinned, why do you not cover his sins? By exposing the sins of others you hinder the way of their repentance and may make one lose people's trust.

D. An offence to the hearers

You certainly know what the Lord said about those who offend others, "Woe to him through whom they (the offenses) do come! It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones" (Luke 17: 1-2). In judging others, you will cause some people to judge you. Some of those who hear your words will believe you, and others will not. Those who believe you, will think badly of the person you talked about, while those who do not believe will think badly of you. In both cases, the loss will be both yours and theirs.

E. Lack of love

It is written in the bible, “love will cover a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8). When you love someone you will not judge him, but rather defend him.

F. Hardness

Some cases of judging others are accompanied by hard judgment or hard words. An example of this is the scribes and Pharisees who brought the sinner woman after exposing her in front of the people. Not being satisfied with the disgrace they caused her, they wanted to stone her according to the law (John 8:5). Another example is the hardness of those who condemned the Lord Christ to death. The hardness may be in the use of hurting words and may be by not giving excuses to the one judged.

G. Oppressions

Not all judgments are fair. There might be oppressive judgments as in the case when a person judges someone on the basis of what he heard about him by rumors. The oppression may be a result of an uncertainty and not making sure. An accused person is supposed to be innocent until his crime is established.

H. Lying

Lying may be a full lie or exaggeration. A full lie means that a person fabricates a talk against someone to defame him, knowing certainly that such talk is mere slander. He does so out of hatred or kind of revenge, judging that person is a compound sin involving many other sins.

I. Self righteousness

One who judges others is usually forgetful of his sins. If a person remembers his own sins, he will not think of his brother’s sins, talk of them, or blame him for them. Self-righteousness makes one feel better than the others and judging them increases arrogance when a person compares himself to someone of a lower level. A good example of this is the Pharisee and the tax collector.

J. Hypocrisy

A person who judges another for some fault which he himself does or even worse is described by the Lord Christ as a hypocrite.

III. Sayings Of The Fathers About Judging Others

St. Irayes: It is good for one to eat meat and drink wine rather than eat the flesh of the brothers and drink their blood through slander.

St. Pachomius: Do not despise anyone or judge him though you see him falling in sin. The teaching of the Bible asserts this rule in the story of the woman caught in adultery. The Lord thus gave us a lesson not to judge anyone even though we see him falling in sin.

Mar Isaac: One who looks at the plank in his own eye, will not find time to look at the speck in his brother’s eye. One who connects the weak points he sees in others has found a spiritual mirror within him.

IV. Judging Events But Not Persons

Judging actions is permissible if it comes from someone having authority or under responsibility as a father, a mother, a priest or supervisors.

God does not prevent us completely from judging but commands us to follow justice, to judge in

the proper time to judge a certain act, not everything and to avoid judging the person.

The apostle says, “Who then are you to judge your neighbor” (James 4:12). We may answer and say: “I am responsible of my brothers and sisters in Christ and their actions”. We may advice and guide others as the apostle says, “if anyone among you wanders from the truth and it brought back by another you shall know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner’s soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20). The advice should be with politeness, humbleness and love. Reproach and advice should not be given to a suffering soul for bitter soul needs comfort. So, advice and reproach should be used at a suitable time.

We should not condemn someone for a certain behavior, without examining and giving him opportunity to defend him “Judge not before time” (1 Timothy 5:24).

Applications:

How to avoid judging others?

- ❖ Train yourself to respect others; therefore, train to honor and love people in their presence as well as their absence. God says, “*Bless those who curse you*” (Matthew 5:44). It is proper than cursing our brothers.
- ❖ Train yourself to speak only about the virtues of others
- ❖ Try to avoid hearing what is said about the faults of others.
- ❖ Do not believe all that is said about the others’ faults.
- ❖ Try further to pray for the judged and the judging persons that God may cover their sins.
- ❖ Try to overcome judging others by love.
- ❖ Do not judge according to the visible.
- ❖ Train yourself to tolerate those who offend you.
- ❖ Self-condemnation is important. It leads to humbleness, repentance, purity, and proper absorption of judgment as St. Macarius the great says, “Condemn yourself, my brother before you are condemned.”

Week 5 - The Feasts of the Coptic Orthodox Church

Objective:

- ❖ To appreciate the joy in the Orthodox Church through her many feasts.
- ❖ To know what are the main feasts in the Orthodox Church.

Memory Verse:

“Rejoice in the Lord and again I will say rejoice” (Philippians 4:4).

References:

- ❖ <http://www.Stgeorge-sporting.org/church/copticchurch/thecoptic.Htm>
- ❖ “The Precious Gemstone in Explaining Church Rites” Iris El-Masry.

Introduction:

Moses’ Law arranged seven major feasts (Leviticus 23), which had their rites and sanctity, as a living part of the common worship. These feasts are: the Sabbath or Saturday of every week, the first day of every month, the Seventh Year, the Year of Jubilee, the Passover (Pascha), the feast of the weeks (Pentecost), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Feast of Harvest). After the Babylonian exile two feasts were added, i.e., the Feast of Purim and the Feast of Dedication.

The aim of these feasts was to revive the spirit of joy and gladness in the believers’ lives, to consecrate certain days for common worship in a holy convocation (assembly) (Exodus 12:16; Leviticus 23); and to remember God’s promises and actions with His people to renew the covenant with Him on both common and personal levels. These feasts were a means by which the people were led to enjoy Christ, the continuous “Feast” and the Source of eternal joy.

When the Word of God was incarnate and became man, He submitted to the Law, attended and celebrated the feasts. However, He diverted attention from their symbolism to spirituality, and from the outward appearances to the inner depths (John 2-12), to grant the joy of the feast through practicing the secret communion with God and receiving His redeeming deeds.

Lesson Outline:

I. Feasts and Worship

Almost every day is a feast in the Coptic Church. Although she is known for bearing the cross, she is eager to have her children live, while in the midst of sufferings in spiritual gladness. She is capable, by the Lord’s help, to raise them above tribulations. In other words, the Coptic Church is continuously suffering and joyful at the same time. Her feasts are uninterrupted, and her hymns with their variety of melodies are unceasing.

II. A Church of Joy

One of the main characteristics of the Coptic Church is “joy,” even in her ascetic life. St. John Cassian described the Egyptian monks who spread from Alexandria to the southern borders of Thabied (Aswan) saying that the voice of praise came out perpetually from the monasteries and

caves, as if the whole land of Egypt became a delightful paradise. He called the Egyptian monks heavenly terrestrials or terrestrial angels.

St. Jerome informs us about an abbot called Apollo who was always smiling. He attracted many to the ascetic life as a source of inward joy and heartfelt satisfaction in our Lord Jesus. He often used to say, “Why do we struggle with an unpleasant face? Aren’t we the heirs of the eternal life? Leave the unpleasant and the grieved faces to pagans, and weeping to the evildoers. But it befits the righteous and the saints to be joyful and pleasant since they enjoy the spiritual gifts.”

This attitude is reflected upon church worship, her art and all her aspects of life, so that it seems that the church life is a continuous unceasing feast. Pope Athanasius the Apostolic tells us in one of his paschal letters that “Christ” is our feast. Although there are perpetual Feasts, the believer discovers that his feast is in his innermost, i.e., in the dwelling of Christ the life-giving Lord in him.

The church relates and joins the feasts to the ascetic life. The believers practice fasting, sometimes for almost two months (Great Fast) in preparation for the feast, in order to realize that their joy is based on their communion with God and not in eating, drinking and new clothes.

The Coptic feasts have deep and pleasant hymns, and splendid rites that inflame the spirit. Their aim is to offer the living, heavenly and evangelic thought and to expose us to the Holy Trinity and their redeeming work in the life of the church, in a way that is simple enough to be experienced by children, and deep enough to quench the thirst of theologians.

III. Feasts of the Coptic Church

A. The Seven Major Feasts of Our Lord

- 1 **The Annunciation on Paramhat 29, c. April 7:** In it we recall the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, and the attainment, which the men of God had longed for across the ages, namely the coming of the Word of God incarnate in the Virgin’s womb .
- 2 **The Nativity of Christ on Kiahk 29, c. January 7:** It is preceded by a fast of 43 days. It is the confirmation of the divine love, when God sent His Only-begotten Son incarnate. Its aim is to prepare the hearts of the believers to receive Jesus Christ; the Word of the New Testament, in the same way Moses fasted in order to receive the Ten Commandments, the Word of the Old Testament.
- 3 **The Epiphany** or the Baptism of Christ on Tuba 11, c. January 19/20. It is connected with Nativity and the circumcision feasts for in the Nativity, the Word of God took what is ours (our humanity), and in the “circumcision”, He subjected Himself to the Law, as He became one of us. But in the Epiphany, He offered us what is His own. By His incarnation, He became a true man while still being the Only-begotten Son of God, and by baptism we became children of God in Him while we are yet human beings. In this feast, the liturgy of blessing the water is conducted, and the priest blesses the people by the water on their foreheads and hands to commemorate baptism.
- 4 **The Entry of Jesus into Jerusalem (Palm Sunday):** It is the Sunday that precedes Easter. It has its characteristic joyful hymns (the Shannon -Hosanna (Matthew 21:9)), and its delightful rite. The church commemorates the entrance of our Lord Jesus into our inward Jerusalem to establish His Kingdom in us and gather all in Him. A procession moves towards the nave of the church where it stops before the icons of St. Mary, the Archangels, St. John the Baptist, the Apostles, the martyrs, the ascetics, etc...and before the church doors and the baptismal basin, praising God who embraces all together in His Son Jesus Christ. The procession ends by re-

entering the sanctuary of God as the saints of the Old and New testaments meet with the heavenly in heaven (sanctuary) forever. At the end of the Liturgy of Eucharist, a general funeral service is held over water, which is sprinkled on everyone just in case anyone may die during the Holy Week, since the regular funeral prayers are not conducted during this week. By this rite, the church stresses on her pre-occupation with the passion and crucifixion of Christ only.

- 5 **The Glorious Feast of the Resurrection:** (The Christian Pascha or Passover) It is preceded by the Great Lent of 55 days) and is considered by the Coptic Church as the “Feast.” Its joy continues for fifty days until the Feast of the Pentecost (the Pentecost is actually the fifty day period). The feast of the Resurrection is also essentially celebrated on every Sunday.
- 6 **Ascension:** It is celebrated on the fortieth day after the feast of the Resurrection, always on a Thursday. In this feast we recall Him who raises and lifts us up to sit with Him in heaven (Ephesians. 2:6).
- 7 **Feast of the Pentecost:** It represents the birthday of the Christian Church. The Only-begotten Son paid the price for Her salvation, ascended into heaven to prepare a place for Her, and sent His Holy Spirit to Her, offering her existence, guidance, sanctification and adornment as the Heavenly Bride. In this feast, the church chants hymns, being joyful with the resurrection of Christ, His ascension and the dwelling of His Holy Spirit in Her, thus she connects the three feasts together.

B. The Seven Minor Feasts of Our Lord

- 1 **The Circumcision of our Lord:** It is celebrated on the eighth day after Nativity on Tuba 6, c. January 14. On this day we remember that the Word of God who gave us the Law, has subjected Himself to this Law, fulfilling it, to grant us the power to fulfill the Law in a spiritual manner. Thus we enjoy the circumcision of spirit and that of the heart (Colossians 2:11), instead of the literal circumcision of the flesh.
- 2 **The Entrance of our Lord into the Temple** on Amshir 8, c. February 15: We remember that the Word of God became man and does not want us to be careless about our lives, but to set our goals early since childhood. Thus we have to work and fulfill our goals regardless of people related to us, in spite of our love and obedience to them (Luke 2:24).
- 3 **The Flight of the Holy family to Egypt** on Bashans 24, c. June 1: The Coptic Church is distinguished among all nations with this unique divine work, by the coming of our Lord to Egypt and living among the Gentiles.
- 4 **The First Miracle of our Lord Jesus at Cana of Galilee** on Tuba 13, c. January 12: Our Lord changed the water into wine, as His first miracle, at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, confirming His eagerness to see us attain the heavenly wedding, and granting us the wine of His exceeding love.
- 5 **The Transfiguration of Christ** on Mesra 13; c. August 19: The unity of the two testaments was manifested in this feast, for Moses and Elijah assembled together with Peter, James and John. The glory of our Lord was revealed to satisfy every soul who rises up with Him to the mountain of Tabor to enjoy the brightness of His Glory.
- 6 **Covenant (Maundy) Thursday:** This is the Thursday of the Holy Week, in it we commemorate the establishment of the Sacrament of Eucharist by our Lord Jesus, when He offered His Body and Blood as the living and effective Sacrifice, capable of sanctifying our

hearts, granting us the victorious and eternal life. This is the only day of the Holy Week in which Sacrifice of the Eucharist is offered, and the rite of washing the feet is practiced in commemoration of what Christ did for His disciples. On this day also an unusual procession takes place, starting from the south of the church nave, during which a hymn of rebuking Judas the betrayer is chanted as a warning to us not to fall like him.

- 7 **Thomas Sunday:** This is the Sunday that follows the feast of the Resurrection; in it those who believe without seeing are blessed, so that all might live in faith through the internal touch of the Savior's wounds (John 20:29).

C. The Monthly Feasts

The believers joyfully celebrate the commemoration of the Annunciation, Nativity and Resurrection of Christ on the 29th of every Coptic month (except during the Great Lent).

In addition, the commemoration of St. Mary is celebrated on the 21st of each Coptic month while the feast of the Archangel Michael is celebrated on the 12th of every month.

D. The Weekly Feasts

Every Sunday stands as a true Sabbath (rest), in which we find our rest in the Resurrection of Christ. There is no strict abstention from food on Sundays after the celebration of the Eucharist, even during Great Lent. In addition, since the Lord rested from His work on the Sabbath (Saturday), we also avoid strict abstinence on this day.

E. Feasts of the Saints

There is a daily feast, so that the believers may live in perpetual joy and in communion with the saints. In addition, there are other special fasts and occasions:

- ❖ **The Feasts of St. Mary:** The Coptic Church venerates St. Mary as the "Theotokos," i.e., the Mother of God, whom the Divine Grace chose to bear the Word of God in her womb by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:35). Since she is considered to be the exemplary member in the church, and the interceding mother on behalf of her spiritual children, she is exalted above heavenly and earthly creatures. Therefore, the church does not cease glorifying (blessing) her and celebrating her feasts in order that we imitate her and ask for her intercessions on our behalf. Her main feasts are:
 - a) The annunciation of her birth (Mesra 7, c. August 13);
 - b) Her Nativity (Bashans 1, c. May 9);
 - c) Her Presentation into the Temple (Kiahk 3, c. December 12);
 - d) Her Repose (Tuba 21, c. January 29);
 - e) The Assumption of her body (Mesra 16, c. August 22)
 - f) Her apparition over the Church of Zeitoun (Paramhat 24, C. April 2);
 - g) The consecration of her first Church in Philippi (Paona 21, c. June 28)
- ❖ **The Apostles' Feast** (Abib 5, c. July 12): This is the feast of martyrdom of the Apostles Peter and Paul. It is preceded by a fasting period, which starts on the day following the Feast of the Pentecost. In this feast, the liturgy of blessing the water takes place, in which the priest washes the feet of his people commemorating what the Lord did for His disciples. Thus, the priest remembers that he is a servant who washes the feet of the people of God and not a man of authority.

- ❖ **The Nayrouz Feast** (1st of Tute, c. September 11): The word “Nayrouz” is Persian word, meaning “the beginning of the year.” The Egyptian calendar goes back to 4240 BC. Copts restarted the calendar with the beginning of Diocletian’s reign in AD 284, to commemorate the millions of Coptic martyrs. His reign is considered a golden era in which the church offered true witnesses to Christ, when the souls of martyrs departed to paradise and kept shining as living stars therein. This feast, with its joyful hymns, continues until the feast of the Cross (Tute 17, c. 27 September). Thus the church announces her joy and gladness with the martyrs through bearing the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, the sufferings and martyrdom were turned into a source of joy.
- ❖ **The Two Feasts of the Cross:** The first feast is on Tute 17, (c. September 27). It commemorates the dedication of the Church of the Holy Cross, which was built by Queen Helen, the mother of Emperor Constantine. The second feast is on Paramhat10 (c. March 19) and commemorates the discovery of the Holy Cross by the same empress in AD 326. During these two feasts, the church conducts a procession similar to that of Palm Sunday and uses the same tune in chanting (Shannon-Hosanna), to announce that the cause of her joy with the Cross is the openness of the hearts (the inner Jerusalem) to receive the Savior as the King who reigns within us.

Applications:

- ❖ Memorize the seven major and minor feasts of the church.
- ❖ Read in the Synaxarium about all the feasts of the church
- ❖ Participate in the celebration of the feasts with the church

Conclusion:

The Coptic Orthodox Church is a live and joyful church. She also unites the heavenly and earthly churches together throughout the year.

Week 6 - The Book of Acts

Objective:

- ❖ To understand the background and the theme of the book of Acts.
- ❖ To learn from the strength of the first church.

Memory Verse:

“And you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth”(Acts 1:8).

References:

- ❖ The Book of Acts
- ❖ Interpretation of the Book of Acts - Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

Introduction:

Jesus’ last recorded words have come to be known as the Great Commission: “You shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). The Book of Acts, written by St. Luke, is the story of the men and women who took that commission seriously and began to spread the news of a risen Savior to the most remote corners of the known world.

Lesson Outline:

While the apostles are mentioned collectively at several points, this book really records the acts of St. Peter (1-12) and of St. Paul (13-28).

I. The Author Of The Book Of Acts

Acts 1:1 refers Theophilus to “The former account,” that is, the Gospel of Luke. Luke’s source for the “we” sections in this book (16:10-17; 20:5-21: 18; 27:1-28: 16) was his own memory if not some kind of diary. For the remainder of this book, Luke no doubt followed the same careful investigative procedures that he used in writing his gospel (Luke 1:1-4). As a close traveling companion of Paul, Luke had access to the principal eyewitness for chapters 13-28.

II. The Time Of Writing The Book Of Acts

St. Luke’s perplexingly abrupt ending about St. Paul awaiting trial in Rome has led many to believe that Acts was completed prior to Paul’s trial (AD 62). If it was written after this crucial event, why didn’t St. Luke mention the outcome? St. Luke may have had a reason, but the simplest explanation of his silence is that Paul had not yet stood before Caesar. Acts gives no hint of the persecution under Nero (AD 64), Paul’s death (AD 68), or the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70).

III. The Theme Of Acts

The resurrected Savior is the central theme of the sermons and defenses in Acts. The Old Testament Scriptures, the historical Resurrection, the apostolic testimony, and the *convicting* power

of the Holy Spirit all bear witness that Jesus is both Lord and Christ (see Peter's sermons in 2:22-36 and 10:34-43) "To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins" (10:43). "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (4:12).

IV. Outline of Acts

This is the only book that carries on the story from His ascension to the period of the New Testament epistles. Thus, Acts is the historical link between the gospels and the epistles. Acts is a pivotal book of transitions from the gospels to the epistles (history), from Judaism to Christianity (religion), from law to grace (divine dealing), from Jews alone to Jews and Gentiles (people of God), and from kingdom to church (program of God).

The three movements in Acts follow its key verse (1:8): **witness in Jerusalem** (1:1-8: 4); **witness in Judea and Samaria** (8:5-12: 25); and **witness to the end of the earth** (13-28).

A. Witness in Jerusalem (Acts 1-4)

After appearing to His disciples for "forty days" (1:3), the Lord tells them to wait in Jerusalem for the fulfillment of His promise concerning the Holy Spirit. Ten days after His ascension, this promise is significantly fulfilled as the disciples are empowered and filled with the Holy Spirit. The disciples are transformed and filled with courage to proclaim the brand new message of the resurrected Savior. Peter's powerful sermon, like all the sermons in Acts, is built upon the Resurrection, and 3000 persons respond with saving faith. After dramatically healing a man who was lame from birth, Peter delivers a second crucial message to the people of Israel resulting in thousands of additional responses. The religious leaders arrest the apostles, and this gives Peter an opportunity to preach a special sermon to them.

The enthusiasm and joy of the infant church are marred by internal and external problems. Ananias and Sapphira receive the ultimate form of discipline because of their treachery, and the apostles are imprisoned and persecuted because of their witness. Seven men, including Stephen and Philip, are selected to assist the apostles. Stephen is brought before the Sanhedrin; in his defense. Stephen surveys the Scriptures to prove that the Man they condemned and killed was the Messiah Himself. The members of the Sanhedrin react to Stephen's words by dragging him out of the city and making him the first Christian martyr.

B. Witness in Judea and Samaria (8:5-12: 25)

Philip goes to the province of Samaria and successfully proclaims the new message to a people hated by the Jews. Peter and John confirm his work and exercise their apostolic authority by imparting the Holy Spirit to these new members of the body of Christ. God sovereignty transforms Saul the persecutor into Paul the apostle to the Gentiles, but He uses Peter to introduce the gospel to the Gentiles. In a special vision Peter realizes that Christ has broken down the barrier between Jew and Gentile. After Cornelius and other Gentiles come to Christ through his preaching, Peter convinces the Jewish believers in Jerusalem that "the Gentiles had also received the word of God" (11:1). Even while experiencing more and more persecution, the church continues to increase, spreading throughout the Roman Empire.

C. Witness to the End of the Earth (13-28)

Beginning with chapter 13, Luke switches the focus of Acts from Peter to Paul. Antioch in Syria gradually replaces Jerusalem as the headquarters of the church, and all three of Paul's missionary journeys originate from that city. The first journey (AD 48-49) concentrates on the Galatian cities of

Pisidia, Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. After this journey, a council is held among the apostles and elders of the church in Jerusalem to determine that the gentile converts need not submit to the Law of Moses regarding circumcision. The second missionary journey (AD 50-52) brings Paul once again to the Galatians' churches, and then for the first time on to Macedonia and Greece. Paul spends much of his time in the cities of Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth, and later returns to Jerusalem and Antioch. In his third missionary journey (AD 53-57), Paul spends almost three years in the Asian city of Ephesus before visiting Macedonia and Greece for the second time. Although he is warned not to go to Jerusalem, St. Paul cannot be dissuaded.

It is not long before St. Paul is falsely accused of bringing Gentiles into the temple. Only the Roman commander's intervention prevents his being killed by the mob. Paul's defense before the people and before the Sanhedrin evokes violent reactions. When the commander learns of a conspiracy to assassinate Paul, he sends his prisoner to Felix, the governor in Caesarea. During his two-year imprisonment there (AD 57-59), St. Paul defends the Christian faith before Felix, Festus, and Agrippa. His appeal to Caesar requires a long voyage to Rome, where he is placed under house arrest until his trial.

Applications:

- ❖ Pray so that God will work with His Holy Spirit in the church now as it was in the early days.
- ❖ Start "witnessing" to the resurrected Savior to non-believers around you.

Conclusion:

The book of Acts is the only book in the Bible that documents the history of the original apostolic church since initiation on Pentecost.

Week 7 - The Pentecost in our Lives as Young Adults

Objective:

- ❖ To revive the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

Memory verse:

“Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:5).

Introduction:

- ❖ The experience of the earlier apostles when the Holy Spirit descended upon them on the Pentecost fifty days after the resurrection.
- ❖ Why it descended as a violent storm, as tongues of fire settling upon each one, so that each spoke according to what the Spirit inspired.

Lesson Outline:

I. Do Not Be Sad And Do Not Oppose The Spirit

- ❖ What saddens the Spirit is our being unfriendly and constantly occupied and distracted by material matters and affairs.
- ❖ What also sadden the Spirit are the hidden sin, irresponsible behavior and indulgence in lust so that there is no self-examination or accountability.
- ❖ Another source of sadness is our laziness in worship, slackness in prayer, fasting, repentance, and our lack in partaking of the Holy Body and Blood in the Communion.

II. Be Filled With The Spirit

A. How to be filled with the Spirit?

- ❖ **Personal prayer.** Study the canonical prayers of the third hour, in which we make supplications that the Spirit of God fills us. The Spirit arouses the soul through prayer. The Apostolic Church is an example of knees bowing in prayer.
- ❖ **The Bible.** The Word, which I speak to you, is Spirit and Life. You are holy on account of the Word I speak to you. The Holy Bible reveals God’s plans, the obedience of the Spirit, and the love of Jesus Christ.
- ❖ **The Liturgy.** The holy mysteries enflame the soul if practiced through the Spirit filling it with satisfaction and appeasement. Study the history of the Apostolic Church to see how it carefully practiced the reading of the Word, prayer, fellowship, and partaking of the Holy Eucharist.

B. The conditions for getting filled with the Spirit

- ❖ Obeying the Spirit.
 - a) This involves obeying the commandments of the Holy Bible.

- b) Obeying the spiritual instructions of the Church.
- c) Obeying your father of confession as a spiritually experienced man.
- ❖ Loving the Lord fervently.
 - d) This is evident in the form of a warm prayer and dialogue.
 - e) Testify to His Name through words and deeds.
 - f) Love His children and His brothers who are poor.
- ❖ Being Ascetic and crucifying the self and its egocentricity.
 - g) Asceticism provides the opportunity for the spirit to soar. That is why the Church focuses on constant prayer and long periods of fasting, kneeling in worship, reclusion, and rejection of physical pleasures. In this way, it is possible to enjoy a fervent spiritual life: I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me.
 - h) Crucifying the self is surrendering the reins to the Spirit so that He is in charge.
 - i) A life of sacrifice also allows the Spirit to be in control.
 - j) A life of sacrifice and the resistance of selfishness provide an opportunity for the spirit to be filled and to grow in grace, supplication and humility.

III. The Fruits Of The Spirit

A. Love

Love does not demand proofs and is not conditioned by a response, it is pure and does not wish or seek anything for itself (1 Corinthians 13). It is a practical love within the framework of truth. For example, in the Apostolic Church, they sold their possessions and brought them before the feet of the apostles. This framework makes Christian love distinct from worldly love. Examples are found in the chronicles of the saints.

B. Joy

- ❖ Christian joy is distinctly in contrast with the lavishness of earthly sparkle.
- ❖ The apostles were full of joy and the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ Joy is a sign of cheer arising from salvation and efficacy of the Holy Spirit.
- ❖ Joy is the Christian's testimony before the world that he fears nothing and lusts for nothing.
- ❖ Joy is related to abstention, and associated with the renewal of life, and with singing and giving praise.

C. Peace

- ❖ Christian peace is different from worldly peace.
- ❖ It is a peace that surpasses all understanding, preserving our thoughts in Jesus Christ.
- ❖ The confines of inner peace cannot be trespassed by the world. Neither can its purity be confused. Examples of peace are found in the peace of the apostles as they were taken to the arenas of martyrdom and thrown in.

D. Long Suffering

- ❖ This is the fruit of the Spirit.
- ❖ It involves tolerance of others especially in times of weakness.

- ❖ It involves the appreciation of love and its victory over any other factor.
- ❖ It is trust and faith in the Word of God.

E. Kindness

- ❖ This involves the sweetness inspired by the Spirit's effect in our lives.
- ❖ Kindness in words and deeds. Sweetness does not imply weakness or hypocrisy; rather it is associated with discipline and cheerfulness.

F. Goodness

- ❖ Out of the goodness of a heart comes goodness. This involves the sanctification of the heart intentions, senses, and thoughts.

G. Faithfulness

- ❖ Faith in things unseen. Faith in God's promises however long it takes.

H. Gentleness

- ❖ It is opposed to cruelty and violence. It is gentleness that tolerates injustice with sweetness and cheer. However, it does not imply subjection or weakness. In fact, it holds its ground while behaving sweetly and tactfully.

I. Chastity

- ❖ It is opposed to immorality, Curiosity, and gossip. It is sexual chastity and physical chastity because the eye does not covet what others have and the ear does not intrude into other people's news. Thus it is concentration as opposed to distraction and loss.

IV. Walking In The Spirit

We do not follow our own will since we practice obeying the Spirit and trust His guidance. In fact, we are led by the Spirit in every action, where we give the Spirit the leading role to control our behavior.

We should not be admirers, vexatious, or envious towards one another; these are the fruits of pride, selfishness and a sign that the Spirit has departed from us.

The fervor of preaching and zeal to save souls: We study the lives of the apostles and disciples to become aware of the great influence of the Pentecost on their ministry. It was a fervent spiritual ministry; e.g., St. Paul's sermon, St. Stephen's speech, St. Paul's attitude on different occasions, etc.

THE APOSTLES' FAST PERIOD

Use Filler lessons (at the beginning of the book) between the feast of Pentecost and the second week of July.

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF JULY

Week 2: Building the Heavenly Kingdom

Week 3: Faith and Patience

Week 4: Mixing with the Opposite Sex

Week 2 - Building the Heavenly Kingdom

Mediation:

We pray that we be counted with the five wise virgins who were watchful, filled their lamps and were ready for the arrival of the bridegroom and entered his wedding. We pray that the fire of His Spirit would take away the laziness of the five foolish virgins away from us.

Objective:

- ❖ To learn the dimensions of the Heavenly Kingdom.
- ❖ Our role in building the Heavenly Kingdom.

Memory Verse:

“As you go, preach, saying the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 10:7).

References:

- ❖ Matthew 3; 10
- ❖ Revelation 21
- ❖ Sermon of Pope Shenouda (Thy Kingdom come)
- ❖ “Heaven” - Anba Youanis

Introduction:

Since the sin of Adam, man had been cast out of God’s sight in paradise to live in the realm of Satan. The authorities of darkness and death overruled every man, until our Lord conquered death by His death and became King on the wood of the cross (Psalm 95). He also said, “I am going to prepare a place for you (in the kingdom of heaven)” (John 14:2). The preparation for the heavenly kingdom was the focus of the preaching of St. John the Baptist, our Lord Jesus Christ and the disciples. Since we always pray and say “thy kingdom come”, where are we now in the process of preparing for the heavenly kingdom?

Lesson Outline:

I. The Kingdom In Our Hearts

The heavenly kingdom starts in the hearts of those who enthrone the Lord as king over their hearts. The Lord said, “give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my way” (Proverbs 23:26). However, He is a unique king. You are not forced into his kingdom, and He does not force Himself over your heart. He actually reigns through love.

II. The Kingdom On Earth

The heavenly kingdom is also felt among the people who show good will and love to each other (John 15:12). In heaven, God will wipe away every tear from our eyes and by doing this same thing to each other on earth we start the heavenly kingdom on earth (Revelation 21:4).

III. Our Role In Building The Heavenly Kingdom

To build the heavenly kingdom we have to know what is the kingdom built of? In revelation chapter 21, a description of the New Jerusalem: *“Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God” (Revelation 21:3)*. Then, the building blocks of the kingdom are the people of God. So, How many blocks did you put to build the kingdom? How many did we bring to God and His kingdom? Or do you care only about entering first and everybody else should take care of his own salvation?

Building the kingdom need lots of hard work and perseverance to bring more and more people to the kingdom. It needs great sacrifices, like sacrificing your own comfort to comfort others. We may need to sacrifice our leisure time to win infinite time with the Lord in heaven for you and for others. It also may need financial scarifies to help others in times of need. The more sacrifice we give the more blocks we place in building the heavenly kingdom.

There are many great examples of builders of the heavenly kingdom who entered and brought with them hundreds or even thousands of men and women. St. Peter, with one sermon on the day of Pentecost, converted 3000 men into Christianity. St. Paul, through his trips spread the Word and brought thousands or even millions into the kingdom. Another great example is St. Anthony who started monasticism and showed many of his followers a new way of building a close relationship and dedication to God. St. Demiana brought 40 virgins with her to the kingdom when they were martyred for the name of Christ. St. Rifka brought her children with her when they were slaughtered on her lap for Christianity. So, how many are you bringing to the kingdom with you?

Building the kingdom may take many forms. A wife may care to bring her family and children to the kingdom with her. A Sunday school servant works hard to bring his students to the kingdom with him. A preacher would preach the Word to every soul that does not know Christ. Every one of us has a chance somehow, somewhere to bring more people with him to the kingdom of God.

However, we have to be careful that others may enter and we remain outside. The Lord gave an example of those who said we performed miracle in Your Name but He said to them: *“I do not know you” (Matthew 25: 12)*. So, be watchful also for your own salvation. The sight of a chicken who walks with all her chicks walking behind her brings the question again how many are walking behind you into the kingdom of heaven? Are you like a magnet that attracts tens of pins to it or you make people repel from you?

Conclusion and applications:

Every one of us has to help in building the heavenly kingdom by bringing more people with him into the kingdom of God.

Week 3 - Faith and Patience

Objective:

- ❖ God will solve our problems. Fulfill our needs. Have faith in Him, and wait PATIENTLY for His solutions.

Memory Verse:

“By your patience, possess your souls” (Luke 21:19).

Introduction:

- ❖ “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11: 1).
- ❖ “My brothers, count it all joy when you fall in various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience” (James 1:2-3).
- ❖ “But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness” (1 Peter 1:5-6).
- ❖ “So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and struck Job with painful boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. And he took for himself a post shed with which to scarp himself while he sat in the midst of the ashes. Then his wife said to him, ‘Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die.’ But he said to her, ‘you speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (Job 2:7-10).
- ❖ “Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord - that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (James 5:11). “But we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulations produce perseverance” (Romans 5:3).
- ❖ “Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him. Do not fret because of him who prospers in His way. Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass. Wait on the Lord and keep His way. And He shall exalt you to inherit the land. When the wicked are cut off, you shall see it” (Psalm 37:7,34).

Lesson Outline:

- ❖ How do you feel while waiting in long lines (Amusement Parks, fast food restaurants, banks...)?
- ❖ Describe the emotions of people during traffic jams?
- ❖ How do you handle these situations?
- ❖ What is the definition of faith? What is the relation between faith and patience?
- ❖ Can you give some examples from the Bible of people that have endured for a long time with faith and patience?

- a) Joseph: hatred; false accusation from employer; separation from his family.
- b) Job: financial ruin; death in family; sickness; problems with wife and friends.
- ❖ Can you relate your life to these problems?
- ❖ Why do you think God waits, sometimes it seems for us too long, before He solves our problems?
 - a) To test our faith ...
 - b) Our problems which, if we endure patiently, and He eventually solves, is glorifying to Him
 - c) This, in turn, earns us glory in His kingdom ...
 - d) He knows the right time that is best for solving our problems.

Applications:

- ❖ Give examples from our lives for people who endured problems for a long time and prevailed by their faith that gave them perseverance.

Conclusion:

Faith and patience are always rewarded with victory on earth or eternally because He said, “behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his works” (Revelation 22:12).

Week4 - Mixing with the Opposite Sex

Objective:

- ❖ Get youth to look at the opposite sex with respect. To preserve themselves from lusts and keep their thoughts and their actions pure and holy.

Memory verse:

“Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure” (1 Timothy 5:22).

Introduction:

In our society, the two sexes intermix in most sectors: in Church, at work, in transportation and in institutes.

In some sectors such interaction is limited: such as in Churches and at home. In others, interaction is wide open: in institutes, transportation and jobs.

The problems of mixing with the opposite sex arise from over interaction; for even though the heart is loyal to God and filled with grace, yet being unreserved, staying out late and mixing freely, results in a gradual deviation of emotions. This leads to involvement and problems.

Lesson Outline:

I. How To Mix With The Opposite Sex Without Creating Problems?

We interact in Church and sing with one voice, pray together and get involved as we stand before God. We become integrated with Him and not with people.

This is the tip of the thread to successful behavior in mixed society, which involves:

A. Being filled by God

- ❖ There is a great difference between being basically occupied by this world and God is just a part of it, and God's presence in our life and the earth is part of His world.
- ❖ There is a great difference between living with God while the world, with all what is in it - college, work, neighbors, and television - is only a part of our life in Christ. Or living and enjoying all the latter while Christ is just a part of the chain of our interests on earth.
- ❖ Christ cleanses us of many things, and allows us to enjoy many good and pure things.
- ❖ If we live in the world and consider Christ as part of it, we do not find comfort. However, if we live for the Lord and the world is nothing compared to Him, then we find comfort. In that case, we get to select what we read, see, and hear and to make friends on Christian basis and fulfillment, for we belong to Christ and not to the world. Christianity represents holiness; it is not forced, or superficial neither is it the ethics followed by man to govern his manners. Rather, Christian manners are an expression of the new life, implying that all is changed.

B. Objective preoccupation - interest in work

- ❖ An objective attitude is one that is related to work and is not concerned with people. For instance, if we go to Church and look left and right or are interested in the people, then we are

in the Church with our body not with our souls; we are not occupied by prayer. On the other hand, if we are wholly caught up by the words “Lord have mercy” and if our hearts and thoughts focus on all the prayers then this is a correct social attitude as it is an objective one. However, in our society, we suffer from egotistical individual thinking. Objective thinking demands immersion (absorption) in work. It is necessary to focus on the subject rather than on our colleagues around us. It is also necessary to focus on correct attitudes rather than on attractive ones.

- ❖ It is necessary to master objective thinking in all matters rather than subjective personal thinking. Moreover, there is social thinking too. Correct objective thinking and social thinking are two basic methods in learning. Consequently, we find that one of the principles of universal study focuses on small groups known as workshops. With the above in mind, our Church needs this kind of collective practical thinking as its guiding principle. It is also relevant to our goals as it ensures a correct social attitude that transcends individual or personal preoccupation. This insures the absence of relationships or errors that could be destructive.

C. Limited interaction

- ❖ Duplicating ourselves with our society does not constitute social success. On the contrary, it is the interaction based on the principles of our God and Lord Jesus Christ while keeping our inward peace and fullness through God that constitutes success. In fact, orienting ourselves to whatever society so that we become its duplicate causes disruption in our character.
- ❖ Speaking with colleagues politely and briefly, and dealing with society while our spirits are filled with the Lord allows us to accept what is appropriate and reject what is not. That is the correct way to social orientation. It is worthy to note that accepting everything in a society develops in us feelings that correspond with those of society, for feelings are formed by repetition of an event accompanied by acceptance or rejection. Thus, words constantly repeated by a specific youth and repeatedly feeling comfortable with him creates emotional involvement. Youthful rashness or recklessness subsequently heightens these feeling. Youth imagine that such feelings are right and sincere; while in most cases they constitute a deviation from the right path.
- ❖ We should adopt an attitude based on brevity and fellowship. There is no need to draw attention or to lose character. Joseph and David were two prophets who were concerned with pleasing God. However, David, in a moment of weakness sinned, and was overwhelmed by the feeling of having fallen. On the other hand, Joseph was always on the lookout and was, consequently, victorious. It is necessary to guard our feelings so that they belong to Jesus Christ and within His holy embrace and dominion. Let us be aware that any feeling can change, for many have loved one another, got married and then experienced different and changed feelings, that is because Christ was not the basis upon which they had formed their feelings.
- ❖ Participate in Church organized social activities in the form of lively and creative meetings. You will gain spiritually, as well as learn how to participate and behave correctly.
- ❖ Correct social behavior requires us to preserve our feelings with the Lord continuously. As for society, we need to be cautious and satisfied with good neighborly relationships devoid of any personal commitments (bondage).

Conclusion:

- ❖ We should be filled with Christ just as the early followers were by being occupied with the church activities, spiritual readings, singing hymns and partaking of the Holy Communion. The early followers lives were steadfast in grace, and they worked in society vigorously. Their personality was satisfied and brimming with Christ so that they rescued society from the evils of idol worship while they grew in grace.
- ❖ We should be immune and reserved. We should be interested in reaching the Christian message in society even though we may not speak. In this way we shall become oriented in the right way and would learn to deal with people while preserving our entities.
- ❖ We should not give weight to what society or young colleagues say. Neither give attention to the glamour of cheap books and their appeal, “for all these are disputes and arguments over words” (1 Timothy 6:4).

LESSONS FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST

Week 1: The Epistle to the Colossians (I)

Week 2: The Epistle to the Colossians (II)

Week 3: The Virgin Mary in the Coptic Church

Week 4: The Spiritual Value of Using the Agpeya for Praying

Week 1 - The Epistle to the Colossians (Part I)

Objective:

- ❖ Underlining the preeminent glory and honor of Christ, the Lord, and His transcendence

Memory verse:

“For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power” (Colossians 2:9).

Introduction:

I. The Church of Colossi

Paul met a fellow prisoner by the name of Epaphras while in prison in Rome, (Philemon 1:23). This person was renewed (converted), sometime during the three years that St. Paul spent in Ephesus, and founded a church in Colossi as the verses indicate in Colossians 1:7 and Colossians 4:12.

II. The heretics in Colossi

- ❖ St. Paul learned from Epaphras that they were numerous in Colossi.
- ❖ It seems that the heresies arose from the Jews, the Gnostics, the worshippers of angels, and those claiming that the flesh is inherently evil.
- ❖ Based on their teachings, it was claimed that God had invented a being, which could move between His infinite character and that of evil. This third being was considered less holy than the Highest One, it was Christ, who came devoid of divinity and closer to man’s nature, in order to elevate it to higher levels. Undoubtedly, such heresy sought to destroy Christ’s divinity and His glorious intercession, and consequently to reduce Him into one of the numerous other intercessors.

Lesson Outline:

I. Synopsis of the Epistle

A. Introduction

Thankfulness to the Colossians and intercession on their behalf (Colossians 1:1-14).

B. Doctrinal section

The glory of Jesus Christ, His honor and preeminence (Colossians 1:15 - 2:3).

C. Practical section

- ❖ Warnings against false heresies (Colossians 2:4-23).
- ❖ Union with Christ and its results (Colossians 3:4-6).
- ❖ Spiritual exhortations to the fathers, women, children and slaves (Colossians 3:18 - 4:5).

D. Closing

- ❖ Closing salutations and commendations (Colossians 4:3-18).

II. The Introduction

Contemplate the meaning of “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ.” He is not an apostle sent by a man.

- ❖ The members of the Church are saints for they are sanctified in Christ and they are brothers for they are members in one body.
- ❖ In verses 3-5, the apostle draws together the themes of faith, hope and love. Do we have a living faith in Christ and do we show love towards all saints arising from the hope laid for us in heaven?
- ❖ Contemplate verses 6-8 where one of the slaves establishes a church and how the truth about the Word was delivered through him. St. Paul praises the efforts arising from the faith of the Colossians.
- ❖ In verses 9-14, study the prayer that St. Paul offers on their behalf and which he constantly recites that they may be:
 - a) Filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all wisdom, and divine understanding.
 - b) Fruitful in every good work.
 - c) Chaste according to God’s glorious power and might.
 - d) Patient and joyfully long suffering in the face of any hardship.
 - e) Thankful of the heavenly Father who made them worthy to share the inheritance of the saints.

May our holy fathers’ prayers be confined to these aims when they intercede on behalf of their children and their congregation.

III. The Doctrinal Section

Christ’s glory, honor, and preeminence (Colossians 1:15 - 2:3). Note that the talk about the Son necessarily leads into talking about the Father, His work towards redemption through which we have been reconciled, loved, and made worthy to share the inheritance of the saints, and to live in the Light. For without His love we could not have been saved from the power of darkness or accepted and transported into the kingdom of His beloved Son, the kingdom of Christ. It is through Christ that we have been redeemed and through His Blood we attained forgiveness of our sins. Notice how the cross covered the debt we owed, and how the Blood effectively brought about righteousness, reconciliation, redemption and adoption.

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation”, in other words, the Son is exactly the same as the Father in nature and essence. This is what is meant by “the image of the invisible God,” because the image corresponds exactly to the original. Thus the image of the invisible God is also invisible, which means that Christ originally, and before the incarnation, was invisible due to His divinity. However, by becoming incarnate we saw Him and through Him we got to know the Father present within and united with Him “he who has seen Me, has seen the Father.” That is seen spiritually and by faith and not by earthly knowledge.

“The firstborn of all creation,” indicates that He is the source and origin of all life and creation. He is the spiritual source out of which all creatures have sprung, “For by him all things were created,” so that the starting point of all creatures was in Him.

Let us contemplate the greatness and glory of God for “all things were created through Him and for Him.” In other words, there would have been no existence or stability for creation without Him.

Moreover, there would be no real presence for creation unless it is associated to and dependent on Him. Notice that He is the head of the body of the Church, the One preeminently honorable. The Church consists of branches and He is the beginning and the end, the firstborn from the dead. For He is the first who arose, ascended, and sat on the right hand of the Father so that He may have preeminence in all things. Surely He deserves all glory, honor, dominion, and power since He was slain for our sake and we were bought to God, His Father, from every nation, tongue and tribe. Glory be to Him forever, Amen.

IV. Remainder Of Chapter One

“And by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the Blood of the Cross, whether things on earth, or things in heaven” (Colossians 1:20).

This, too, is the Will of the Father, that He sacrifices His Son. Jesus Christ, so that by offering Himself. He becomes a burned offering and atonement for sin and transgression. In this way He enacted reconciliation and peace between heaven and earth. He has made them both to become one, the heavenly and the earthly. This reconciliation does not indicate that God harbored enmity toward us. Nevertheless, it means that He cancelled enmity, that is sin, and trampled its power by His death on the Cross. Through the Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ we have become new creatures since we have become part of the covenant of adoption and love. We have become His bride.

As for the power of reconciliation, it is present in the Blood, and through the Blood “And you who were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh, through death to present you holy, and blameless, and irreproachable in His sight” (Colossians 1:21).

The Colossians were considered as gentiles, unassociated with the flock of the Jews, so that they had no promise, no legacy, no inheritance. We, too, are like them. We are all strangers and enemies. We had no knowledge of God, we had no Bible, our works were wicked, and our nature selfish and unclean. Praise be to God who has granted us holiness through His Spirit.

The task of reconciliation was achieved by the death of His incarnate Body, since at His death on the Cross, and in the terms of divine justice, His offering was accepted before the Father for it gave Him pleasure, joy and peace. The aim of His death and resurrection was to sanctify us and be united with us. In this way, we obtained purity through His holiness. Holiness is the name by which the Holy Trinity was declared, and through Him and Jesus Christ we have become saints. For saintliness is partaking in God’s life. It is the perfection of baptism and the entry into the mystery of redemption. The holiness granted to us urges us to walk towards eternity and the coming kingdom. It increases as we cling closer to the Holy One who is distinctly detached from the wicked.

“If indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the Gospel which you heard, which was preached to even creature under heaven” (Colossians 1:23).

This is the basic condition that would make us holy and without blame at His second coming; that we remain grounded and steadfast in the faith and confident in the message and the choice announced to us in the Holy Bible. Moreover, we should not be shaken by temptation or suffering if we want to retain the sacred hope we have received from the Bible.

“I now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up in my flesh what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ, for the sake of His body, which is the Church” (Colossians 1:24).

The apostle here announces an important Biblical message that the suffering he experiences and undergoes in his flesh for the sake of Christ's Church and for spreading the Word is only a sharing of the sufferings on Golgotha. This is sharing, even though in a minimal way. But it is essential to participate in such suffering. For just as the Head underwent suffering on the Cross, so must the members suffer, thus unifying the Church in its moments of pain, and bringing the Head and body together at such times. When Jesus Christ finds that the lost member has undergone the last pain to be tasted, He will appear in His Church and enter into His rest and glory, joyful before the Father on account of the sufferings that He and His Church shared through the ages and past generations.

“Of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God which was given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God, the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His Saints” (Colossians 1:25.26).

St. Paul always spoke with pride about God's call to him to preach the Word and he became a servant of the Church according to the plan of the heavenly Father who chose him to achieve God's work among the Gentiles. That is the great task; that God draws people from all nations to form His Church that will be the object of His love and that will share His glory. This mystery was hidden all through the ages but is now declared to the saints through the Bible.

Verses (Colossians 1:27-29): It is God's pleasure to reveal to believers the richness of the glory prepared for the nations, so that we might share with Him, and become His people, and that He may become our Lord. This is the hope that comes in the person of Jesus Christ, the Savior of us all.

Preachers speak in the name of Christ, and the goal of preaching and teaching is to bring every one into contact with Jesus Christ in order to get filled with all wisdom to become perfect in divine knowledge (and such perfection is only relative, yet it comes from the effect of grace). St. Paul worked day and night to achieve this goal, and he struggled in prayer, fasting, and vigils to that end.

Week 2 - The Epistle to the Colossians (Part II)

Objective:

- ❖ Underlining the preeminent glory and honor of Christ, the Lord, and His transcendence.

Memory verse:

“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:1-2).

Lesson Outline:

Verses (Colossians 2:1-3): The apostle announces to the Church of Colossi his great struggle on her behalf and on behalf of the Church of Laodicea, as well as for all believers he has known, loved, and became close to even though he has not seen them in the flesh. He proclaims that the goals of his endeavors are that:

- ❖ Their hearts may be consoled by His grace.
- ❖ They may be filled with love.
- ❖ They may understand the mystery of Jesus Christ and the Church. The mystery of the love of God the Father, and His Son for the Church.
- ❖ The fullness with such knowledge would be in the Lord Himself since He alone is full of wisdom and knowledge.

I. The Practical Section

A. Warning against heresies (Colossians 2:4-23)

- ❖ Colossians 2:4,5 “Now this I say lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words. For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ”. The apostle warns against sweet words that deceive and lure people towards opinions and principles that are in opposition to the church. When he insists on the heresy prevalent in their midst, he also insists on the power of their faith, thus encouraging them lest they feel the gospel to be burdensome.
- ❖ Colossians 2:6,7 “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving”. Here the apostle underlines that faith is not merely an articulated creed, but, rather, it is an attitude and a way of life. Thus a person who believes in Christ will ultimately have Christ to reign in his heart and mind so that, his whole manner is inspired by the Lord. The apostle also wishes to draw their attention to the necessity of genuine and steadfast faith, as well as the need to be filled with thanks however much the demands of faith may be.
- ❖ Colossians 2:8 “Because lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ”. The apostle once more warns them against those who wish to deceive them through a philosophy that conflicts with Christian faith. Such erroneous philosophy fills

men with pride and vanity. Apparently many vain philosophers have tried to lead the Colossians away from the correct faith.

- ❖ Colossians 2:9,10 “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power”. Here the apostle speaks about the unification of the divinity with the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ: and explains how in the Savior dwells all the fullness of the divinity. This verse pulls down every heresy that diminishes the honor of Jesus Christ or denies that He is consubstantial with the Father. Moreover, he has granted us, the believers, union with the Son that we may be filled with His grace. Thus He is our head and we are His body. He reigns over us and over all principalities and power since He alone is worthy of glory, honor and dominion.
- ❖ Colossians 2:11 “In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ”. The apostle speaks here about the work of redemption and the efficacy of grace in believers, and how these separate them from the world while their hearts have been circumcised, thereby excluding all physical or material love. This circumcision is different from that of the Old Testament which, involved human beings and their circumcision. Here, it is the work of the spirit that casts off the old man.
- ❖ Colossians 2:12 “buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the workings of God, who raised Him from the dead”. The apostle speaks here about the mystery of baptism. He explains how we are buried in the baptism receptacle three times in order to die with Christ who remained three days in the grave. We then arise to a new life, just as Christ arose, vanquisher and victorious. For God, who raised His Son from the dead has also raised us from sin and has granted that we sit with Him in the heaven. These are the two aspects of His divine sacrifice: He was delivered on account of our sins and He was raised to grant us righteousness. We partake of the first aspect of the sacrifice in baptism where we die with Him and are buried with Him when we are baptized. We also partake of the second aspect of the sacrifice, which is the resurrection, by taking communion “he who eats My Body and Blood, shall live in Me”.
- ❖ Colossians 2:13,14 the apostle reveals here how we were enslaved by sin and lust. “Uncircumcision” used in this verse refers to uncleanness. But Christ raised us to live with Him, forgiving us all our sins. He has redeemed the debt we owed tearing it down by the Cross.
- ❖ Colossians 2:15 speaks of the action of the cross where our Lord conquered Satan and his army, disarming them of their power and proclaiming His victory over them.
- ❖ Colossians 2:16,17 indicate the prevalent heresies at the time that aimed at drawing the Church into Jewish life. The apostle shows that the old laws do not rule God’s children.
- ❖ Colossians 2:18,19 the apostle reiterates his warnings to believers against the prevailing heresies. These claimed the difficulty to communicate and the sufficiency to worship angels as a sign of humility and acknowledgement of their inability to reach God. The apostle describes these heretics as people who do not hold steadfastly to the “Head (Jesus Christ), from whom all the body, joints and ligaments, grows with the increase which is from God.”

B. Partaking in death and resurrection with Him

Colossians 2:20-23 “Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations”.

As for the heresies, which became widespread in Colossi, the apostle condemns them as they are an invitation to return to the old order of life governed by heretic human thoughts and not by the Will of God. Examples of such heresies, mentioned by the apostle are the worship of angels as a sign of humility, and the humiliation of the body as an aim in itself.

II. Chapter Three

Colossians 3:1-4 “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not things on the earth. For you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life, appears then you also will appear with Him in glory”.

Those who have risen with Christ, have all their interest linked with Christ, who sits at the right hand of God. Thus most important sign of a believer is that his yearnings are sublimated, his feelings sanctified, his inclinations heavenly oriented and his thoughts elevated.

Concerning God’s children, the apostle says that their existence is hidden and it is Christ who appears and works in them “it is no longer I who lives, but Christ lives in me.”

If the glory, which is Christ’s, does not appear in us now, it is because we are still in the flesh. However, we receive this glory secretly and it will be announced when the Lord comes in the clouds and His glory appears. At that time we “will appear with Him in glory”, which is ours through Him.

What a great hope, we will be glorified with Him! This is our only consolation whenever we suffer with Him. Whenever we are persecuted, crucified, or put to death with Him for the purpose of achieving His mission, which He has entrusted within our souls.

Colossians 3:5-7 The apostle speaks about the need to kill the old self: to struggle against the lusts of the body, such as adultery, uncleanness, delinquent passion, and greed that involves idolatry, love of money and selfishness. All these things invoke God’s anger upon the wicked. We were enslaved to all these before we knew the Lord; but thanks be to God who has granted us victory in Jesus Christ.

Colossians 3:8-11 Having exhorted believers to abstain from apparent ugly sins such as adultery and the worship of money, the apostle speaks about uglier and more object matters which are far more dangerous. He speaks about “anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy language”. These sins are inappropriate and do not fit the children of God who are calm, loving, gentle, and chaste in all their members. The apostle then forbids lying in the same manner he used in the epistle to the Ephesians; all such behavior is incongruous on the level of the one family whose members are brothers. For can a brother lie to his brother? If we have put off the old self and put on the new, how is it that we continue to follow the latter after having crucified him? We grow and get renewed continually so that we might become in the picture of the great Lord Himself.

In Jesus Christ we have become one family, “there is neither Greek nor Jew, no circumcised or uncircumcised. Barbarian, Scything, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.”

Colossians 3:12-17 Having spoken about negative matters concerning the departure from many sins of varying evilness, the apostle speaks of positive conduct:

- ❖ That “we put on tender mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering, bearing with one another, and forgiving one another.” That is a batch or virtues, which are necessary for God’s children who testify for Jesus Christ. They are also necessary for brotherly relationships and for unity among believers.

- ❖ That we “put on love, which is the bond of perfection” and love as a virtue is the peak of all virtues since they all arise out of it. Because God is love, therefore he who loves is born of God and is able to live in the light.
- ❖ That “the peace of God rule” in the hearts. He gives peace, which is unlike that of the world. Rather, it is a peace that passes all understanding. It protects our thoughts and hearts and keeps them in Jesus Christ.
- ❖ That we be “thankful” in order to progress in virtue and obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ. A life of thankfulness is necessary.
- ❖ That the Word of God lives richly in our hearts “singing with grace” to the Lord. This is the sign of a fulfilled life where the Word is active and thereby achieving inner renewal (the words I speak to you are spirit and life).
- ❖ That we surrender our lives totally and completely to the Lord “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus... Let God be all in all”.

This constitutes the life pattern of true children of God. They do not claim anything as their own yet; they have been bought by the precious Blood in order to glorify God in their lives. He has died so that the living do not live for themselves in the future, but rather live for Him who died and rose for them.

Applications:

Examine yourself carefully. Then undertake one of the following exercises:

- ❖ Do I always aspire to heavenly matters?
- ❖ Do I crucify the passions of the flesh through grace?
- ❖ Am I filled with love, which is the way to perfection?
- ❖ Am I constantly and sincerely thankful and singing praise to the Lord?

Week 3 - The Virgin Mary in the Coptic Church

Objective:

- ❖ Giving honor and praise to the holy Virgin according to the commandments of divine inspiration.

Memory verse:

“Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

Introduction:

The fathers consider Virgin Mary as the mother of us all. We also like to think of the resemblance between the Virgin Mary and the Church. This enables us to examine our relationship with our mother, the Virgin; as well as estimate our membership in the holy, universal and Apostolic Church of the One God.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Virgin Receives The Good News

The holy Virgin was a representative of mankind when she received the good news. All mankind responded through her holy mouth as she received and expressed her acceptance of the Holy Incarnation. On that day, she said: “Behold the maidservant of the Lord!” This was to be fulfilled in the fullness of time. It was an announcement of mankind’s spiritual preparedness to receive God among them.

The Church resembles the Virgin in that both are the holy receptacle that carries the Word announcing salvation and God’s message to mankind. Insofar as the Church obeys the commandments, accepts them, as testified in the lives of her children and as she reveals her features and characteristics that indicate that she is the consecrated bride. Just as the mouth of the holy Virgin was filled with praise, so the children of the Church sing songs of praise and prayer.

II. Meditation on Virginity

St. Augustine says about the Mother of God “She is a virgin while she is pregnant, a virgin though a mother, and a virgin at her death.”

In the Saturday Theotokia, we say, “She was called the mother of God, the real King; and having given birth to Him, she remained a virgin by an astonishing decree.”

- ❖ The Church is also like a virgin honored by God and His commandments. She is as a spotless bride.
- ❖ The Church is also like a virgin for she turns all the feelings of Her children towards Her Redeemer.

III. Names of the Virgin

The Coptic Church refers to St. Mary by many names such as:

1. The True Queen

2. The Ever Virgin
3. The Second Heaven
4. The Honorable Mother of Light
5. The Golden Censor
6. The Beautiful Dove
7. The Mother of God (Theotokos)
8. The Ark overlaid with Gold
9. The Imperishable Temple
10. The Hidden Manna

Week 4 - The Spiritual Value of Using the Agpeya for Praying

Objective:

- ❖ Training on practicing prayers using the Agpeya (the book of hours and becoming enriched through them).

Memory Verse:

“Seven times a day I praise You because of Your righteous judgments” (Psalm 119:164).

Introduction:

The book of the Agpeya contains the seven prayers of the hours recited during the day and night. The word Agpeya is derived from the Coptic word “agp” meaning “hour”. These hours are seven according to David the prophet who says: “Seven times a day I praise You because of Your righteous judgments” (Psalm 119:164). The hours are: prime, terce, sext, none, vespers, compline, and midnight.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Wisdom Of The Church In Arranging The Agpeya Prayers Of The Hours

There is no doubt that the church set up, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the prayers of the seven hours for our spiritual benefit. These help us to increase in faith and stature until we reach the height and completeness of Christ Himself (Ephesians 4:13).

The Church has also arranged the prayers of the hours to enable her children to lead life of prayer and adhere to God being in constant communion with Him. Furthermore, the prayers include useful spiritual teachings.

II. Sources of prayers

The Church has drawn for the prayers in the Agpeya from three sources: the Psalms, the Gospels, and the prayers of the saintly and holy people.

The psalms come first in order and consist of twelve psalms, then a passage from one of the Gospels, followed by three or six prayers taken from the fathers. A benediction composed by one of the holy fathers is recited at the end, and is appropriate to the hour of the prayer.

III. Arrangement

The Hours have been arranged according to the most important events related to our Savior Jesus Christ so that we are constantly reminded of God’s plans to redeem and save us. We will present a brief summary of each hour of the Agpeya below:

A. Prime, The Prayers of the First Hour

They are arranged in memory of the Lord’s resurrection from the dead. We therefore pray to thank God for having allowed us to pass the night safely and beg Him to protect us during the day. We pray that He will protect us from sin and give us peace.

B. Terce, The Prayers of the Third Hour

They are arranged by the Church in memory of three occasions:

- ❖ The trial of Jesus Christ before Pontius Pilate and the decree to crucify Him (Psalm 15:25: Isaiah 53:7).
- ❖ The Lord's ascension (Psalm 23).
- ❖ The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples (Acts 2:15).

C. Sext, The Prayers of the Sixth Hour

They are arranged in memory of the crucifixion of Christ on the cross after bearing many sufferings, beatings and floggings. The Lord prayed on the cross (Luke 23:34). At that hour the Lord also led the Samaritan woman to repent (John 4).

C. None, The Prayers of the Ninth Hour

They are in memory of Christ's redeeming death, which was necessary to achieve our salvation.

D. Vespers, The Prayers of the Eleventh Hour (Prayers at Sunset)

They are arranged in memory of the hour when the Holy Body of Christ was brought down from the cross to be buried.

E. Compline, The Prayers of the Twelfth Hour (Bedtime Prayers)

They are arranged in memory of the burial of Christ's body after preparing it, and according to the words of the psalmist: "*on my bed I remember You*" (Psalm 63:6). This is also an hour of repentance before God at bedtime.

F. Midnight Prayers

They are arranged in accordance with the words of the psalmist, "I will rise late in the night to give thanks to You" (Psalm 119:62). The object of staying up late is meditation upon the divine Word, which helps us to lead a life of repentance and get ready for the second coming of our Lord.

IV. Some of the benefits and blessings of praying using the Agpeya

It is possible to discover the benefits and blessings obtained by following the Agpeya if we try the beauty and depth of prayer achieved in the process. Among these, the following will be noted:

A. The prolonged presence before the Lord

In our personal haphazard prayers, we stand before the Lord for a few minutes only. On the other hand, following the Agpeya gives us the opportunity to stay longer before God and enjoy a close relationship with Him (Psalm 37:4).

B. The inclusion of all forms of prayer

- ❖ **Thanksgiving:** This is a special prayer at the beginning of all the prayers in the Agpeya, along with numerous verses giving thanks found in other psalms.
- ❖ **Repentance and Humility:** This is in Psalm 50 (51) which is recited in the introduction of every hour just like the prayer of Thanksgiving. There are other numerous psalms dealing with this aspect throughout the Agpeya.
- ❖ **Glorification and Praise:** There are many prayers said in this context such as the Three Holies, the Song of the Angels, and other psalms spread out in the various hours of prayer.

- ❖ **Supplication:** This includes all the requests a person prays for as well as his needs in different situations, especially the need for forgiveness of sins - both hidden and apparent as well as seeking God's help to save us from envy and temptation.

C. Praying fervently for mercy

At the end of every hour, the person repeats forty one times the words "Lord have mercy." By praying fervently, we know that the Lord will not return our prayers unanswered. Jesus underlined that in the parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18:1-7).

D. Praying in accordance with God's Will

If your prayers are in accordance with God's will, then "*the Lord will hear your prayer in the day of trouble and the name of the God of Jacob will keep you safe...*" (Psalm 20:1-5).

E. Lessons on how to pray

The Psalm says, "*Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with tremble. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him*" (Psalm 2:11,12).

F. There is an element of preaching in the prayers of the Agpeya

This refers to didactic and preaching trend besides that of worship and contemplation. This complies with the advice of the apostle "*but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*" (Hebrews 3:13).

G. Being spiritually preoccupied all day long

Most people remember the Lord at the start and at the end of the day. As for the rest of the day, it is occupied with conflicts and worries so that there is no time for prayer. Therefore, our mother, the Church, who is concerned about our joy and salvation, invites us to pray all day long by providing the Agpeya, the Book of the seven canonical prayers.

H. A healthy and spiritual meal

One of the Church fathers likens the Agpeya, to a nourishing meal and goes on to say that it is the attire of a wedding that qualifies us and directs our thoughts and feelings so that we can enjoy the blessings of this invitation. This attire consists of a dress, a belt, and shoes: The dress stands for the Lord's prayer, the belt stands for the prayer of thanksgiving, and the shoes stand for the prayer of repentance.

I. A dialogue with God

"Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness, You have relieved me in my prayer" (Psalm 4:1).

J. Countless spiritual benefits

Through prayers based on the Agpeya, we learn to live a life of faith. Our hearts are filled with peace and security and we draw various spiritual lessons.

V. The reasons that led the Church to use the Psalms in Prayers

The Church has chosen to use the book of Psalms in all prayers for many reasons, some of which are:

- ❖ In the character of David there is a combination of astonishing experiences, he was a shepherd, a great king, an inspired prophet, a saint, and a human being tried by temptations. These experiences find an echo in our psychological make-up and needs.

- ❖ The psalms are the Words of God conveyed to David by the Holy Spirit and this is what Jesus clarified by His own words, “David being led by the Holy Spirit...” (Matthew 22:43).
- ❖ The Psalms contain the element of thanksgiving, the language of angels and spiritual beings.
- ❖ The Psalms provide a wonderful opportunity for contemplation to those who pray them sincerely, for the Spirit of God is their source.

VI. Our Lord Jesus Christ is our model

- ❖ Our Lord Jesus Christ is our Great Teacher of prayer who spent all night long in prayer (Luke 6:12).
- ❖ He used to pray in the early morning as it is written. “Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed” (Mark 1:35).
- ❖ Jesus prayed at the sixth hour (Luke 23:34) and He also prayed at the ninth hour (Luke 23:46).
- ❖ He used to pray at night (Matthew 14:23). In the midnight prayer He observed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He offered three consecutive vigils (Matthew 26:36-45). To emphasize the midnight prayers, He gave us the parable of the wise virgins (Matthew 25:13).
- ❖ Thus, Jesus set firm foundations for prayer and worship (1 Corinthians 14:4), and organized it for us. For He is a God of peace and order and He is not a God of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:3). That explains why He has left us a model to follow (1 Peter 2:21) in order to enable us to walk in His steps.

VII. The Ideal Way Of Praying With The Help Of The Agpeya

How to pray in an ideally correct way using the Agpeya without being burdened or bored by routine. We mention below a few rules or conditions:

- ❖ Have your own prayer book of the Agpeya next to your bed and note down on the margin your own contemplation or interpretations that help you understand and meditate.
- ❖ Even if you have memorized the prayers by heart, look at the pages and use all your senses while saying them so that you are not distracted.
- ❖ Say your prayers aloud to prevent your mind from wandering. Do not say them quickly, otherwise you could miss the pleasure and spirituality of prayer and do not mumble the words.
- ❖ Reciting the psalms to music or chanting them is important as this provides comfort and consolation.
- ❖ Read some interpretations and studies related to the psalms and gospels to help clarify ambiguous verses.
- ❖ Lift up your eyes, heart, thoughts, your hands, and your whole being towards heaven. This will allow you to live some moments in heaven while you are still on earth, and conquer through perseverance all the army of the evil one as well as their wicked head.
- ❖ Repeat the sweet name of Our Lord Jesus Christ during prayer, every time you say “God” follow up by “Jesus Christ”.

- ❖ It would be convenient to make the sign of the Cross and kneel down to the floor every time you give glory to God.
- ❖ Beat on your chest in humility every time you mention sin and offer repentance. Ask for mercy by saying, for example, “have mercy upon me, according to Your great mercy, O God”.
- ❖ It is preferable to say all the prayers included in each hour, though you could consult your confession father . Do not neglect to say a spontaneous prayer at the end of your prayers in which you have recited the psalms.
- ❖ If you are behind, you could compensate the hours you have missed by’ saying them at any other time. This is useful and good and you may want to sit quietly after that to achieve some rest - spiritual and physical.

**Lesson of the First week of September
Before the Coptic New Year**

Week 1: Worship

Week 1- Worship

Objective:

- ❖ The Liturgy and the Eucharist constitute the practical realization of fellowship and communion with God and with believers.

Memory verse:

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer.” (Acts 2:42)

References:

- ❖ Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-26; Luke 22:17-20; John 6:48-58; Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 10:15-22; 1 Corinthians 11:20-31; Hebrews 13

Introduction:

The church servant reads (1 Corinthians 10:15-22) and focuses on the following:

- ❖ The Liturgy and the Eucharist constitute the participation in the mystery of our union in Christ.
- ❖ The Liturgy and the Eucharist constitute participation in the unity among believers.
- ❖ How do I practice the prayers of the Liturgy and the Eucharist?

At this stage the Church servant clarifies to his children how the collective, national, and ritual worship (Liturgy), that lead to communion are not simply a church function. Rather, it is her life.

Lesson Outline:

I. The Liturgy And The Eucharist Constitute Participation In The Mystery Of Our Union With Christ

A. Steadfastness in Christ

This means full attachment to Christ, forming deep ties with Him and originating through Him (John 6:56; Matthew 26:26). As we unite with Christ, we take on His image and likeness and become partners in the Divine Nature (2 Pet 1:4; Ephesians 5:3; 1 Corinthians 6:17; 1 Pet 1:12).

The Eucharist is the peak of the Liturgy through which we offer the sacrifice of praise to God (Hebrews 13:15).

B. The Eucharist is holiness and purity

The priest begins the prayer of sanctification from the Liturgy. This indicates the mysterious efficacy of the Eucharist through which the partaker's heart is granted light and receives resources to conquer evil. (Romans 8:37).

St. Macarius the Great says, “With this mystery, you are protected against the enemies. Moreover, anyone who underestimates this mystery is overpowered by the forces of darkness.”

Our Lord has prepared this awesome table as stated in Psalm 23:5 and Psalm 43:5. By this mystery we obtain forgiveness of sin; for sin cannot be forgiven without the blood of Christ. The mystery of the Eucharist is the constant offering made on the Cross. This offering is made to wash away the sins of the world.

At this point the church servant indicates the relationship between the purity attained by the believer through communion and that attained by Isaiah when his lips were touched by a live coal taken from the Altar.

C. The Eucharist is life and resurrection (John 6:48-58)

We draw the following thoughts from these words:

- ❖ Christ is the source of life (John 14:6; John 11:25).
- ❖ Manna, which was eaten by the Israelites in the wilderness, was a symbol of the Body of Christ. However, it could not satisfy the hunger of the spirit. In contrast, the Divine Liturgies are adequate spiritual food.

D. The Eucharist is fruitfulness and goodness (John 15:4,5)

Our fallen nature cannot bear fruit to the glory of God. There is no way of reforming the soul without union with the person of Christ. Similarly, there is no hope for a bad tree to bear good fruit, unless that tree is cross-fertilized by another that is good.

The Church servant, here, relates this text with the Lord's words concerning the Holy Communion: it achieves complete steadfastness in His Holy Person (John 6:56).

When our life in God bears fruit, we testify to the virtues of Him who has called us from darkness to His wondrous light. Our whole life and behavior proclaim His wonders.

E. The Eucharist is interaction (living or dwelling together) and joy

The Church servant focuses here on the aspect of meditation and joyful feelings experienced by a person who has received communion from the Holy Mysteries.

There is nothing more wondrous than God's love for us and His humbleness. It did not suffice Him to die on our behalf, but He also found pleasure to offer His Body and Blood to be our food (Psalm 23:5; Psalm 116:12; Zech 9 17).

II. The Liturgy And The Eucharist Constitute A Participation In Achieving Unity Among Believers

Upon gathering around the holy offering, all believers become united as one in spirit and thought and also in body (Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 10:17; Ephesians 5:30). These meanings are stressed by the St. Paul in many parts of the Bible.

Romans 12:4-16; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:1-6. Not only do believers share the Liturgy prayers with those still alive in the flesh, but they also join and share them with those living in heaven (review the prayer of blessing recited on preparing the incense offering, and the prayer of the Council in the Holy liturgy).

III. How Do I Practice The Prayers Of The Liturgy And The Eucharist?

A. The various ranks of priesthood and the whole congregation should join together

This is necessary as no liturgy can be observed without a priest a deacon, and a congregation.

B. The necessity of observing both the inner and outer elements of worship

The Orthodox worship is not mere lip service or jests; it is concerned with the heart and thought which are lifted up to God. Prayer is offered for the total sanctification of the human being. It is within the unifying framework of prayer that believers have come together at all times and throughout the ages.

C. The necessity for spiritual and mental preparation

It is clear that the road along which the Church accompanies her children is a very long one. Through the prayers of the Liturgy, the Church prepares their hearts and thoughts to be pure and focussed on heavenly matters. They are finally enabled and qualified to enter the heavens themselves during the Holy liturgy.

The Liturgy includes also the glorification of the saints. If the prayers are to be effective and the intercession of the Saints achieved, then the worshippers need to be spiritually and mentally prepared before offering prayers of glorification.

D. The responsibility of the Church towards the world

A believer is a man of God serving the whole creation and the Church is founded in the world to sanctify, rescue, and save it from its evil trends.

When a Bishop is anointed to serve a bishopric, he is entrusted to serve both Christians and other residents as well.

The offering presented on the Altar is prepared by the whole creation, including man, animal, air, and water (the earth that gives forth wheat, the tools that grind it, the water needed to mix with and the person who will make it). This is significant as all the creation is sanctified through this mystery.

Conclusion:

- ❖ The Church servant guides his children to the importance of preparation as a prerequisite to participation in the Liturgy and the Eucharist.
- ❖ Students need to be trained in practicing and observing the Liturgy and the Eucharist regularly. In this way, they can become fruitful, steadfast members developing and growing out of the press of the vine.
- ❖ Students also need to be trained in experiencing such worship in groups as well as individually.

Applications:

- ❖ Form a choir of deacons to train students to sing hymns and praises.
- ❖ Attend liturgy with due spiritual honor, prayer, and participation in communion.
- ❖ Invite far away stragglers to come and experience the beauty of Orthodox worship. Thus the Church becomes a haven for worship.
- ❖ Spend a spiritual day in Church. Begin by attending liturgy and receive Communion with the rest of the congregation.